

British
Spy
Ring
Mystery

ANDY
ADAMS

A BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURE

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By ANDY ADAMS

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BRITISH SPY RING MYSTERY

Biff Brewster and his British schoolmate, lively Peter Balsam, have been eagerly planning a bicycle trip to Peter's grandmother's home in Devonshire, with a stopover at the Atomic Laboratory where both their fathers are involved in an ore extraction problem. The boys' itinerary has been carefully mapped out so as to include the sights of London as well as the beautiful English countryside.

But strange happenings keep threatening their trip: a mysterious postman connected with a stolen mailbox—a trench-coated shadow on their trail—the puzzling purchase of a rare book—a queer little scientist—the ominous black-bearded man . .

As Biff and his pal cycle along, they become increasingly aware that something they don't understand is going on, and they seem to be in the center of it. Inspector Duggin of Scotland Yard thinks so too, but it is not until the boys wind up their exciting journey with a desperate adventure on the moor that the truth finally comes to light.

BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURES

BRAZILIAN GOLD MINE MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE CHINESE RING

HAWAIIAN SEA HUNT MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE MEXICAN TREASURE

AFRICAN IVORY MYSTERY

ALASKA GHOST GLACIER MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE AMBUSH IN INDIA

MYSTERY OF THE CARIBBEAN PEARLS

EGYPTIAN SCARAB MYSTERY

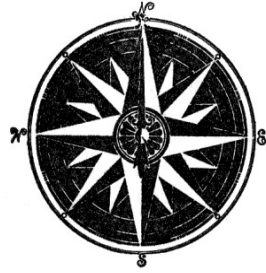
MYSTERY OF THE TIBETAN CARAVAN

BRITISH SPY RING MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE ARABIAN STALLION

MYSTERY OF THE ALPINE PASS

A BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURE



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By ANDY ADAMS

GROSSET & DUNLAP PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK

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British Spy Ring Mystery

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Slowly they drew near the darkened mansion

CHAPTER I

Mysterious Mail

A SCARRED OAK door at Harley School burst open with a crash.

“Biff Brewster!”

“Present.”

“Peter Balsam!”

“Present.”

“All forms report to Speech Room in fifteen minutes, by order of the Head!”

The door slammed.

Biff Brewster rolled out of his bunk and ducked as a form hurtled from the top bunk and landed beside him.

The door burst open again.

“And the Head has a man from Scotland Yard with him,” came the added announcement.

Slam!

Biff looked at the towheaded boy who had dropped down from the top bunk.

“Wonder what’s up, Pete?” he asked.

“Ordinarily I’d suppose it was one of the headmaster’s buckle-down-for-cram-week-speeches,” said his roommate in clipped English accents, “but it sounds a lot more promising with a man from Scotland Yard here.”

“Scotland Yard calls on Harley in the middle of final exams!” Biff said. “Sounds like the start of a British murder movie.”

“I say,” said the boy named Peter, brightly, “you don’t suppose someone has gone and done in Old Gatch?”

“Poor old Mr. Gatchell.” Biff grinned. “You’d wish him anything to escape that Latin exam, wouldn’t you?”

“Not really.” Peter smiled back. “But look hers, let’s get cracking and find out what the Head has up his sleeve.”

Biff followed Peter through the scarred oak door and into the hall of their dormitory where a rapidly growing stream of boys was hurrying toward the exit. This was a quite different-looking group of boys than Biff had mingled with not so long before at his own high school in Indianapolis. Here, blue eyes and blond hair predominated, and each of the boys wore a sort of uniform consisting of blue blazer, gray flannel trousers, black shoes and “Rep” ties displaying the same striped colors—the Harley School colors. Some of the boys wore flat-brimmed straw hats held down

with rubber bands snapped behind their heads.

Looking at the hats, Biff smiled, for he remembered when they had seemed almost comic to him. Now he wore one proudly, however, and woe betide any Eton or Summerhill boy who dared make a remark or take a swipe at 'a Hurley hat during an inter-school cricket or rugger match!

Biff remembered also that he had once called the game soccer instead of rugger; that he had called his instructors teachers instead of masters; and that he had thought of his grade as class instead of form.

He called them by their British names so automatically now it was hard to realize they had been part of his life for little more than ten weeks. It was just ten weeks and three days ago, in fact, that he had first set eyes on all of this and upon the boy whom he could see darting about in the crowd ahead—Peter Balsam, roommate and pal.

"Rumors of everything from murder to a Martian invasion!" Peter called back over his shoulder.

Biff grinned at this accustomed exhibition of Peter's crowd-hopping habit and decided that of all the things hard to believe, the hardest of all was to realize that he had known Peter only from May to what was now July.

In the final analysis, of course, it was well nigh fantastic that Biff should be in Britain and most especially at Harley School for boys in the first place.

He had been extremely lucky to be able to visit several foreign countries in his life because of his

father's position as consulting engineer for an international mining company. The trips, usually taken during school vacations, had led him to exotic countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Tibet or Alaska. But he had reached Britain strictly on his own.

This had happened because Biff had applied, many months before, for an international exchange scholarship. These scholarships enabled American students to attend schools in foreign countries with students in those countries spending a like amount of time at schools in the states. The plan was conceived to allow young leaders of tomorrow to learn at first hand more about their international neighbors.

When Biff learned that he had qualified for one of the scholarships he conferred with his parents about which country he should choose to visit. England was selected partly because of his father's high regard for the British school system, but mostly because of his mother's desire to have him spend one summer away from the wild, animal-infested countries in which he and his dad had spent so much time in the past. His brother and sister, the twins Ted and Monica, were sorely disappointed in his choice, since they always looked forward to the tales of adventure he inevitably brought back after his junkets with their dad to the far corners of the globe.

But Britain it was. One small problem did crop up before Biff's departure. Biff had decided to attend summer school at Harley, just outside London, so he

could be home in Indianapolis in the fall in time for his high school's football season. But they discovered that the ten-week summer term at Harley started in early May and the Indianapolis school term did not end until late June. It was necessary, therefore, for Biff to do some cramming and take his final exams in advance so that he could get to Britain in time for the first day of the summer session at Harley. His school authorities allowed this liberty because they knew of the educational values to be realized by Biff's descriptions of his experiences for the benefit of his school-mates come next fall.

It meant a frantic last few days before his departure, but Biff weathered it, passed all subjects with flying colors. One day later, he climbed eagerly into a jet liner headed for England. But he couldn't deny a feeling of sadness at the sight of his dad and mother and the twins waving forlornly to him as his jet roared off on his first leg to Britain.

Only thirty hours later he was at Harley, enrolled, attending classes and trying manfully to become accustomed to the decidedly English expressions and mannerisms of the lad he had drawn as roommate—one Peter Balsam, esquire.

It was when he learned who Peter's father was that Biff and Peter discovered what a small world this is after all.

Sir Charles Balsam, Peter's father, as it turned out, was Director of the Royal Atomic Research Laboratory

at Edensboro in the south of England. After an exchange of letters with his father, Peter informed Biff that Sir Charles not only knew Biff's dad by professional reputation but that the Atomic Research Laboratory was using some of the very radioactive metal which Tom Brewster had helped discover during the famous *Alaska Ghost Glacier Mystery*.

Then to compound the surprise, Peter looked up from one of his dad's letters one day to announce that Biff's presence at Harley had reminded Sir Charles of Tom Brewster's knowledge of the strange ore, and because of an ore extraction problem they were having at the Lab he was going to contact the engineer for advice on the problem.

Biff was only joking when he said he wouldn't be surprised if the phone should ring one day and his father should announce he was in Britain to help solve the ore extraction problem.

Not two weeks later the phone did ring and Tom Brewster was there!

He told Biff he was going straight from the airport to Edensboro to confer with Sir Charles Balsam but that when he was finished he would head right for Harley to see Biff.

Biff had assumed from the tone of his father's voice that it would be just a couple of days, but he became so involved in cramming for final exams that he suddenly realized that it had been a week since he had heard from his father. It was when Biff decided to call

his dad that Peter came up with a wonderful idea. Why not, he suggested, write to their dads and suggest that instead of having Biff's dad make the long trip from Edensboro to Harley, the two boys bicycle down to Edensboro right after finals, just five days away. Peter had planned to bicycle down to his grandmother's in Devonshire then anyway and it was practically on the way to go via Edensboro. It would give Biff a chance to see the English countryside and avoid interrupting Mr. Brewster's ore investigation.

So the suggestion was quickly mailed to their dads and as quickly okayed. A couple of days later, a follow-up letter came from Biff's dad saying that he was going to arrange for Biff's mother and the twins to come to Britain to join them so that they could all see Britain together. Because of the summer tourist rush, said Tom Brewster, they were having trouble getting jet space but that they should be able to get to England in about two weeks.

That, the boys happily, concluded, gave them plenty of time for their bike trip to Edensboro and Devon.

They had, as a matter of fact, been discussing this very trip when the call had come from the Harley headmaster for all students to assemble at the Old Speech Room. .

"Biff! Stop dawdling and come along!" Peter shouted, awakening him from his reverie. "We want to cop seats down front!"

Biff hurried to catch up with Peter, and together they bolted out the door of Pickering Dormitory and raced across the Harley grounds toward the Old Speech Room in the distance.

They passed moss-coated buildings which had been old before America had even a state to its name, and Biff wondered what his schoolmates in Indianapolis would think of these cramped and drafty buildings as compared to the spacious, air-conditioned structures in which they took their lessons.

The Speech Room was among the most venerable of all the Harley buildings and featured a center rostrum completely surrounded by hard, oaken benches. The boys skidded through the door of Old Speech, only to be brought up short by the restraining hand of a black-gowned, spare old man posted at the door.

“Oops, sorry, Gatch—er, Mr. Gatchell, sir,” Peter gasped.

Old Gatch gave them a solemn nod and motioned them toward the benches already filling with students. Peter led the way, and as Biff slid into place on the bench beside him the English boy nudged him in the ribs and nodded toward the rostrum.

Two men occupied the raised platform. One, in a black gown, was white maned and firm of mouth. The headmaster.

But it was the man beside him who drew every gaze.

This man had a mustache that shot straight out

from the middle of his lip as if electrified. His eyebrows were almost, like awnings over his frosty-blue, deep-set eyes and his hair was reddish with a hint of gray in it.

“Scotland Yard,” whispered Peter.

Biff nodded.

Slowly the room quieted as the last student entered, and less than two minutes after Biff and Peter had arrived, the last whisper died and they heard Old Gatch close the door quietly behind them.

The headmaster rose, shook a wrinkle out of his black robe, and cleared his throat.

“Gentlemen,” he said, without preliminary, “a week ago a postbox was stolen off the street in another part of London.” The headmaster paused and looked slowly about the Speech Room. “That post-box was discovered a short while ago, here on the grounds of Harley.”

A rustle of reaction swept through the assembled students. The headmaster raised his hand to quiet them.

“We now learn,” he went on, “that this postbox has been on the grounds since the day it was stolen—in front of Pickering Hall, as a matter of fact.”

“Our dormitory!” whispered Peter.

“The first time our regular postman happened to see it, he knew the box did not belong in that location. Upon making inquiries on the campus, he discovered that students have been posting letters in it for quite

some time. No regular pickup of mail has ever been made from this box; yet, when it was opened, it was discovered that there was no mail in it.”

The students started to buzz excitedly, and again the headmaster raised his hand.

“This means that whoever took the box and placed it there, removed all the letters that were posted in it.”

The buzz swept over the students again.

“I don’t have to tell you what a serious offense this is,” said the headmaster, “and to emphasize this, I have invited the gentleman you see here with me to say a few words to you regarding the consequences of such an act.” He extended an introductory hand toward the bristly man. “Inspector Ranald Duggin of Scotland Yard.”

The gesture was superfluous since barely a boy had taken his eyes off the man from the moment they had entered the Speech Room.

The detective’s eyes swept the room, and he said, “Boys, this affair probably started out as a prank. Many such serious things do.” He paused. “But I assure you, it has now grown to something larger than that. It is entirely possible that somewhere some pranksters have all of the mail that was posted in this box and do not know what to do with it. They are % probably beginning to realize that they have a tiger by the tail and can’t let go.” Again, the detective paused. “I advise them to let go,” he said coldly. “That is, if they have not destroyed that mail out of panic.” He flipped open

a notebook in his hand and stood with pencil poised. "Now then, who among you have posted letters in the box in front of Pickering Hall this week?" he inquired.

A young lad in the third row raised his hand; another in the front row waved his. Soon, hands were being raised all over the room. Then, as Inspector Duggin began to take the first boy's name, a volunteer from the audience shouted: "I had an answer to one of the letters I posted!"

Inspector Duggin looked up from his notebook in obvious surprise.

"I did too," shouted another boy.

"So did I," said still another.

"Well!" whispered Peter to Biff. "That means whoever put the postbox there, removed the letters and reposted them."

The headmaster had moved up beside the detective, and it was apparent from their expressions that they were discussing the very same conclusion.

Now, a titter of laughter began to sweep the Speech Room. Obviously the boys of Harley thought this a humorous development in the case of the wandering mailbox. What had started out to be high crime seemed to have changed to low comedy.

But, the cold gaze of Inspector Duggin chilled their laughter.

"This is not amusing, gentlemen," said the inspector. "This is still postal theft—and those responsible will be apprehended and dealt with in the

severest manner prescribed by law. I advise those of you with any knowledge of this matter whatsoever, to communicate with your headmaster this very day. If it is discovered that anyone at this school has withheld information, he too, will be severely dealt with.” The detective slowly swept the room with his eyes—as if to make sure each and every boy had gotten the message personally. Then he bowed and said, “I bid you good afternoon.”

The headmaster rose slowly from his seat, nodded a farewell to the detective, and said, “I don’t believe I need add to what Inspector Duggin has told you. I will be in my chambers. Dismissed.”

The chastened and sober students rose solemnly from their seats and whispered their way out the door of the Speech Room and across the school grounds to their dorms.

Not until they were back in their own room and had flopped on their bunks, did either Biff or Peter speak. Then Peter said, “Well, come clean, Brewster. Why’d you pinch the ruddy postbox?”

Biff took a swipe at Peter looking down at him from the top bunk, and said, “Look, you don’t suppose the headmaster would think of keeping us all in school until this thing is solved, do you?”

“Past term’s end, you mean?” said Peter. “I suite hope not! You know what that would do to us?”

“Sure,” said Biff. “Foul up our bicycle trip.”

“Oh, my word. The Head can’t do that,” Peter

moaned. "He wouldn't. We've got to think of something to help clear up this postbox thing."

"Well, let's see," said Biff, lying back with his hands behind his head. "Remember the day you mailed our trip itinerary to your dad so he would know where we were going to be every day? Then you wanted to change it, and we went down to that mailbox to wait for the postman so you could get it back."

"I remember," said Peter. "The postman never showed up."

"Because at that time he didn't know the box was there—remember what the Head said?"

"That's strange," said Peter. "Why, I saw a postman pick up mail from that box. It was one night last week. Let me see—"

Before he could finish the sentence, the door of their room burst open again.

"Biff Brewster! Peter Balsam!" came the cry.

"Here," they shouted in unison.

"Report to the headmaster's office at once!"

The door slammed like the crack of doom.

CHAPTER II

Prime Suspects

THEY looked blankly at the door—then at each other.

“Why us, I wonder?” asked Peter.

“Search me!” answered Biff.

They walked to the door and opened it. Doors all along the corridor cracked open, and eyes followed their slow journey down the hall.

Down the stairs they walked on shaky legs and out across the school grounds, toward the office of the man who controlled the destiny of every boy at Harley.

Two minutes later, they pushed open the huge, polished door with the great brass knocker and entered the hushed confines of the headmaster’s office. A secretary looked at them over his glasses, pushed a button on his desk, and the door to the inner office opened. The headmaster poked his white-maned head out and crooked a finger at Peter.

“You first, Balsam,” he said.

Peter gave Biff a sidewise glance, strode into the inner office, and the door closed behind him.

The ticking of the pendulumed clock took over. Biff let his eyes drift slowly over the framed faces of famous Harley alumni adorning the walls of the headmaster's office. It was hard to realize, thought Biff, that the austere, bewigged and bewhiskered men staring down from these walls had once sat in the very classrooms, listened to the very lessons—and indeed, had perhaps waited on an angry headmaster—just as he, Biff Brewster, was now doing in the 20th century. He read their names off the little brass plates at the bottom of each picture and tried to imagine his own name up there. He couldn't help laughing to himself.

The secretary stared at him fussily, then went back to his figures . . .

The clock struck heavily, and Biff jumped. He noted the time. Fifteen minutes since Peter had entered the sanctum sanctorum.

The door opened.

The headmaster's white-maned countenance looked out at him and a finger was crooked in his direction.

Biff rose on shaky legs and walked into the headmaster's office.

The first thing he saw was Peter, white and big-eyed, slumped in a chair in the corner.

"Brewster, stop gawking at Balsam and look at me, lad," the headmaster commanded.

Biff looked at the headmaster.

“Brewster, I want you to tell me your version of what you were doing loitering in front of the postbox at Pickering Hall three days ago.”

Biff’s eyes flickered toward Peter.

“Without Balsam’s editorial assistance, please,” snapped the headmaster.

“Well, sir,” said Biff. “We were there to retrieve a letter Peter had mailed to his dad. He wanted to get it back from the postman to make a change in it.”

“And what, pray tell, were you doing poking about in the box?” demanded the headmaster.

Biff began to stammer a little. “Why, sir, I don’t believe we poked in the box. We did peek in there to see if the mail might have already been picked up. . . .”

“Are you aware that the postman could not have given you back the letter had he wanted to?” the headmaster asked. “That he could give it only to the person to whom it was addressed?”

“No, sir, I didn’t know that,” said Biff.

“I see,” said the headmaster, staring deep into Biff’s eyes. He paused, tapped a pencil against the desk edge, and added, “Now then—tell me if you please—about a certain postman seen collecting the mail from the stolen box late one night last week”

Biff looked instinctively toward Peter.

“If you persist in doing that, I shall have to send Balsam from the office,” said the headmaster. “Now! What about this postman Balsam is supposed to have seen out of your dormitory window? Did you see

him?”

“No, sir,” said Biff.

“You mean you’ve never heard of the incident?” said the headmaster.

Biff opened his mouth to speak, but no words came forth.

At that point, Peter interrupted. “Sir, he doesn’t know about it. I started to tell him about it just before you sent for us, but never finished.”

“I see,” said the headmaster, looking from Peter to Biff. “Then you, Brewster, have no knowledge of Peter’s mysterious postman who emptied the box before his very eyes one midnight last week, eh?”

“No, sir,” said Biff. “I haven’t, but if Peter says he was there—he was there.”

“Your testimonial is appreciated by Balsam, I’m sure, but since he can’t explain, perhaps you can tell me what a postman would be doing collecting mail in the middle of the night?”

“I’m sorry, sir,” Peter interjected. “I just didn’t think it unusual to see a postman emptying a postbox no matter what the time of night. Of course, if I’d known then that the box was stolen. . . .” Peter stopped and raised his hands expressively.

“If you’ll excuse me saying so, sir,” Biff put in. “Would Peter have told this story of the postman if we had anything to hide?”

“We’ll not discuss the logic or illogic of anything at this time,” said the headmaster. He studied their faces

a moment. "Is it true you are planning a bicycle holiday down to Balsam's grandmother's home in Devon?" he finally asked.

"Yes, sir, by way of Edensboro," said Peter, as if braced for the worst.

"I hope you will be able to make it," said the headmaster. "I most assuredly hope so. You are dismissed—for now."

The boys rose on weak legs—bumped as they started for the door—flushed in embarrassment—and started for the exit again.

Biff made it first, but Peter was close behind.

They tried to walk casually through the outer office, but when they hit the fresh air, they simply ran all out to Pickering Hall.

As the door of their room slammed behind them, Peter collapsed on his bunk. "How is it possible to feel so guilty, act so guilty, and be so bloomin' innocent?" he gasped.

"The Head hypnotizes boys," said Biff, flopping on his bunk and looking up at Peter.

"Maybe it's a good thing I hadn't told you about the postman I saw out this window that night," said Peter. "Our stories would have sounded too pat."

"Well, tell me now, will you?" said Biff.

"Not much to tell," said Peter. "I was simply reading one of my 'whodunits' one rainy night. Don't know whether I fell asleep and dreamed it, or whether I really saw it. I looked out, and there stood a man at

the postbox, collecting letters.”

“At midnight?”

“I don’t know that it was midnight,” Peter protested. “I had lost track of time. It wasn’t as though it was a three-headed monster out there, that I would have been sure to remember. It was simply a postman. I saw him and forgot him, as I told the Head.”

“Okay, okay.” Biff laughed. “But I’d advise you to forget the whodunits and get on with the Latin, old boy. Exam tomorrow, you know.”

A garishly covered book went sailing out of the top bunk and crashed against the opposite wall.

“And so to work,” sighed Peter.

Next day, during every spare minute between classes, they checked their itinerary to see which stop on their bicycle journey they might be able to eliminate, should the headmaster decide to hold all students beyond term’s end. No more intelligence had been issued by the headmaster regarding this point, but it was a source of speculation and worry for every boy at Harley.

As the week wore on, tension began to fade. Reports drifting back from the students’ homes indicated that as far as could be told, every single letter posted in the stolen mailbox had reached its destination. Thus, aside from the dislocation of the box, no practical damage seemed to have been done by the thieves, whoever they might be or whatever their motives for the reposting of all the letters.

And so the last day came, and with it the last exam. Then that was over, and it was the last night. Students waited tensely in every dormitory to see if the headmaster might issue some last-minute edict that would keep them chained to the premises.

But the headmaster's farewell speech came and went. He bade them all good-by, and with hoots of joy, Biff and Peter raced back to their room to pack and prepare to leave at the crack of dawn.

In the morning, they gulped their porridge, gave their room a last lick-and-a-promise, and with back-slapping and noisy good-bys all up and down the hall, the two boys headed for the stairs and freedom. As they did, Biff took one last look back at the place he knew he would probably never see again.

It seemed incredible to him to think that he would miss a 6 A.M. alarm bell, cold showers, a drafty dormitory, and a hard bed. He couldn't have imagined ten weeks ago, that it would be possible to look back fondly on dimly lighted schoolrooms, hard benches, and a back-breaking work schedule.

But he did. And he felt a little lump in his throat as he followed Peter down the stairs and out into the mist of the quadrangle where their bikes were waiting.

"Whither away?" Biff asked. "That is to say, old bean—which direction?"

"To Haverstraw's Bookstore down street, to buy a book for Grandmother," said Peter, climbing onto his bike.

“Oh, yes, the book,” said Biff, remembering that Peter went through a ritual with his grandmother on each visit. She was a rare book collector, and Peter would buy a copy of a famous masterpiece; then he would have great sport passing it off as the real, rare thing, until she could prove differently.

Peter led the way out through the Harley gate, pedaling rapidly, and Biff saw he was going to have trouble keeping up.

“Where’s the fire?” he shouted.

Peter looked back and grinned. “Come on, feather legs,” he shouted.

Biff pedaled harder and managed to gain a little ground. Peter kept looking back to see if he was gaining, then would put on speed to pull ahead again.

This went on for a few minutes. Suddenly, Biff began to notice a peculiar look on Peter’s face. He was still looking back, but he seemed not to be looking at Biff, but at something over Biff’s shoulder.

Biff increased his speed and drew abreast of Peter. He looked at his pal, and puffed, “What are you so interested in back there?”

Peter nodded back over his shoulder. “Don’t look now,” he muttered, “but there’s a man following us. A police-looking type in a trench coat!”

CHAPTER III

On Again, Off Again

THE shadow in the trench coat had his collar pulled up to protect him from the early morning mist. A soft-brimmed hat was snapped down over his eyes so that the boys were unable to get a clear look at his face.

"If that's Scotland Yard," muttered Biff, "they've A got their—their—"

"Confounded cheek is the British term," said Peter. "And it certainly looks like the Yard with that trench coat and that build."

"So they think we may be the mail thieves!" said Biff.

"Apparently," said Peter, flashing a look behind them. Then he grinned. "Tell you what. If trailing hoodlums is what he gets paid for, let's jolly well make him earn his keep."

"Wait—" Biff started.

But Peter was off and flying, and there was nothing for Biff to do but try and keep up with him.

They raced by old taverns, churches, inns, monuments—sights of old London that Biff would love to have stopped and visited. But there was no slowing the fleeting Peter. He was determined to shake the shadow who had suddenly appeared on their trail.

Every so often, even at top speed, Peter would shoot a look behind them, then angle off in an attempt to shake their shadow.

Finally, Biff could stand it no longer.

“Hey—whoa!” he shouted. “I think we’ve lost him!”

Peter took a last look behind them, slowed up, and dropped back beside Biff.

“Believe you’re right.” He grinned. “Now, let’s enjoy the scenery.”

So they pedaled on, more leisurely now, and Biff took time to drink in the countless sights that were so quaint to American eyes. He was amazed by the thousands of bicycles and the types of people who rode them—everyone from bank clerks to bank presidents. In England there were still flower ladies, chimney sweeps, soldiers in high beaver hats, footmen in beribboned knee breeches, and men in top hats and striped trousers.

To Peter this was all old stuff. Biff realized that his friend had again speeded up and was weaving in and out of traffic. It was then they heard a bobby, an English policeman, shout an admonishing “Ere now—’ere now.”

Biff saw Peter’s neck redden and his bike slow. The

English boy turned and smiled back at the bobby. The bobby waved his finger at them and assumed his hands-behind-the-back stance.

Bobbies, Biff knew, got their name from the man who had created the first London police force, Sir Robert Peel. It was said that bobbies carried no guns but relied on their rigorous training and knowledge of police methods to carry out their duties. And their courtesy was famous. How simple, but effective, that “Ere now” had been.

“Haverstraw’s is off to the right somewhere,” Peter shouted back, and Biff remembered about the book they were going to buy for Peter’s grandmother.

He followed the English boy as they turned into a typically narrow English street—little changed, no doubt, from the days when Shakespeare, Henry the Eighth, or Admiral Nelson had walked the city.

“It’s dampening on,” he heard Peter call over his shoulder, and Biff felt the first spray of rain peck his face. He saw Peter reach nonchalantly behind his back and extract a rolled-up raincoat from his saddlebag without slackening speed. Biff had slightly less success but managed to keep up while worming into his own raincoat.

The shower lasted only a few minutes, and by the time they pedaled into the bookstore section, the rain had ceased and people had begun to put down their umbrellas again. They did it automatically—almost as automatically as the rain came and went in England.



*"Haverstraw's is off to the right somewhere,"
Peter shouted*

"I say," Peter called, pointing to the sky ahead. "A rainbow over Big Ben!"

There was, indeed, a beautiful bow ending at the ancient clock tower, and as they parked and locked their bikes to do their shopping, they enjoyed its shining brilliance.

"Haverstraw's is along here somewhere," Peter announced. "I've been there with my grandmother."

They strolled along, peering into the windows of the dimly lit bookshops. They almost had to search for the discreet little signs identifying the stores. The British, Biff had observed, were almost apologetic about advertising their wares. Even their magazines bore little resemblance to the brilliantly colored American magazines. Here on book row, this penchant for understatement showed itself on the doors, announcing such firms as Aldershot & Grimesby, or Wickham and Sons Ltd., with rarely any mention of what their business might be.

It was when the two boys were standing in front of a particularly interesting display of Sherlock Holmes first editions in one of the larger stores, that Biff's attention was drawn to a reflection in the rain-washed window. It was the reflection of a man on the other side of the narrow street, and there was something about the cut of his coat and the soft hat pulled low over his eyes that made Biff's heart jump. Without turning, he gave Peter a nudge and directed his attention to the reflection in the window.

Peter glanced up at the window, then cautiously turned and darted a look across the street. As he did, the man in the trench coat turned his face away from them and stared into the window of a dim little bookshop. They could see him look up to study their reflection as they had studied his.

“Our shadow in the trench coat,” Peter murmured.

“A hard man to shake,” whispered Biff.

“Impossible, if we couldn’t lose him after what we did,” Peter answered.

At that moment the man tugged at his hat brim and with two swift strides walked to the door of the dim little bookshop with the name, Morgan Frierson, stenciled in gold on the glass. He opened it and vanished within.

“Bashful chap,” Peter drawled.

“Wants to be near us but not with us,” Biff added.

“Wonder why?” asked Peter.

“Why not ask him?” said Biff.

“Yes . . . why not indeed?” Peter smiled.

“It’s like belling the cat,” grinned Biff, “but nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

“Good show.” Peter chortled. “Carry on.”

Together, they threaded their way through traffic to the door of the bookshop, peered through the window, and paused.

“I could buy Grandmother’s book here as well as in Haverstraw’s,” said Peter, “and you could look about for our shadow.”

“Good deal,” said Biff, leading the way through the door and into the musty interior. The store smelled as if it had been closed for months, but Biff had gotten used to the mustiness present everywhere in rainy Britain. Dimness was another characteristic of British business establishments, but this place, the boys decided, certainly abused the privilege. Only a couple of naked bulbs lit the interior of the shop. And out of the gloom came hurrying a stooped figure.

“Yes, gentlemen—yes,” said the figure, moving into the light from the window and also blocking their path toward the dimmed bookstacks. They could see the light glinting off his thick glasses and a smile curving a black, spade beard.

“I’m looking for an inexpensive edition of one of the classics,” said Peter, peering over the proprietor’s shoulder to search for their quarry, the shadow. The proprietor was, unfortunately, standing in the middle of the narrow aisle blocking Biff’s path toward the back of the shop where the shadow had evidently disappeared.

“You may be sure we can accommodate you at Frierson’s—certainly indeed,” said the bookseller in a soft, breathy voice.

He stepped back and reached up to one of the dusty shelves. He took down a slim volume and blew on it. Though all the books looked dusty, this one seemed fairly fresh.

“*The Diary of Samuel Pepys*,” read the bearded man

from the binding of the book. “Just a few shillings but beautifully done.”

Peter glanced at the book, felt its binding, and said, “I’ll take it—if you’ll wrap it, please.”

The proprietor smiled, backed off toward his battered cash register, and Biff at last had a path through to the rear of the shop.

While the man wrapped Peter’s purchase, Biff eased along the stacks, looking for some trace of the man who had fled in here to escape the boys. But there was not a sign of life in the shop. There was, however, a back door, and though it appeared to be as unused as everything else in the place, it could have afforded an avenue of escape for the man in the trench coat.

Biff strode slowly back to where the bookseller was handing over Peter’s purchase and change to him.

“Is the book for you, or a gift?” the man inquired.

“A gift,” said Peter. “For my grandmother in Devon.”

“Your grandmother will enjoy this volume very much, I am sure,” said the bearded man.

Peter nodded, and together the boys walked disappointedly from the bookshop.

“Well, we made a brilliant botch of that little job,” said Peter as they reached the street.

“He must have gone out through that back door,” Biff said. “You’d have thought a Scotland Yard man would have stood his ground with us.”

“If he *is* a Yard man,” said Peter.

“Well, whoever he is, he’s off our trail now—so let’s

get on with our trip.”

“Righto.” Peter grinned, and they hurried back to where they had left their bikes.

There surely weren’t bikes anywhere as beautifully made as these lightweight English bikes, Biff decided. They handled so easily and smoothly. No wonder the British were a nation of cyclists. Even now, he could see at least two dozen cyclists of all ages and all walks of life, pedaling their way about London. But he knew he would never be used to the sight of men in striped pants and tail coats pedaling bikes along the street with the dignity of deacons.

The boys made a whirlwind tour of such spots as the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, London Bridge, and Parliament. But as Peter hurried him through each of these historic places, Biff could tell that the English boy had something in mind—something he was saving till the last. And finally, they arrived at the spot.

It was a gloomy, turreted brick building on the embankment of the Thames River, as undistinguished as a pile of masonry as Biff had seen all day. But Peter stood before it with eyes shining.

“Well, what do you think of it?” he asked.

“What time does the ghost get here?” Biff cracked.

“Oh, come off it,” Peter scolded. “Don’t you recognize it?”

“Sorry, old boy,” said Biff in British fashion. “Cawn’t say that I do.”

“It’s Scotland Yard!” said Peter.

Biff stared at the gloomy red building which he had read about since he was a small child; the place made famous in countless detective stories, the standard for scientific detection methods the world over—and he was disappointed.

Peter, however, beamed. Suddenly, he grabbed Biff’s arm. “Look here, there’s a tea shop where many of the Scotland Yard chaps hang out. I could stand a spot. What say?”

“I was wondering when you’d mention food,” Biff sighed. “I’m starved,”

“Naturally,” Peter drawled. “So come along.”

They parked their bikes and entered a small tea shop. It was swirling with tobacco smoke and the heavy-voiced conversation of men seated in groups about the place. There were a few uniformed bobbies and an equal number of plain-clothes men.

The boys slipped into a booth, gave their order to the waitress, and slowly gazed around the room at the men of the celebrated Yard.

Again, Biff was disappointed. Close up, they looked quite undistinguished.

“Here yah, dahlings,” cooed the waitress, setting their tea and sandwiches before them.

“She’s from Devon,” Peter murmured when the waitress had left. “They darling one to death down there.”

They started in on their tea and two huge sand-

wiches, and as he ate, Peter stripped the paper from his bookstore purchase and said, "Help me think of an inscription for Grandmother."

"I don't know her," Biff said, "but perhaps she'd like a little rhyme."

Suddenly, Peter was acting very strangely. He was obviously not hearing a word Biff said. Instead, he was staring with wide eyes into the book he had just opened. He began to turn the pages slowly and carefully—his mouth open in astonishment.

"Pete, what's up—what's wrong?" Biff asked.

"This book. It's not *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* at all," Peter exclaimed. "Biff, this is amazing!"

"What's amazing?" Biff demanded, craning his neck to see the book.

Peter turned the book partially toward him. "Why, this is a copy of *Letters From Junius*," said the English boy. "It appears to have been bound in this new cover by mistake. But the whole inside is *Letters From Junius*"

"Is that good?" Biff asked, reaching over to finger the crumbly-looking paper.

"Good! It's incredible," said Peter. "I've heard my grandmother speak of this book. It's quite rare—written in King George's time—worth lots of money—if it's genuine!"

CHAPTER IV

Burden of Proof

BIFF pulled the little volume closer to him. "Do you know enough to tell whether it's genuine?" he asked.

"I've heard my grandmother describe it often enough, heaven knows," said Peter, "and it seems to have all the earmarks."

"But surely, things like this don't happen," Biff said.

"I've heard of stranger things," Peter replied. "You'd be surprised at some of the places my grandmother has found her rare books. A Mark Twain first edition was used as a doorstop in her own cook's quarters for thirty years."

"Well, what are you going to do with it?" Biff asked,

"Show it to Grandmother, of course," Peter said. Then, with downcast gaze, he added, "And she'll make me take it back"

"Well, I don't know the legal angles in a case like this," Biff began.

Peter snapped his fingers. "But I know who would,"

he said.

“Who?”

“Scotland Yard. Who else?” said Peter. “And we’re right here, so why not ask them?”

Biff made a wry face. “Haven’t we had enough business with the Yard today?” he remarked.

“Not necessarily.” Peter smiled. “Besides, if our shadow in the trench coat was a Yard man, we could shake them up by walking right into their lair, so to speak. We’d soon find out if we were postbox suspects or not.”

“Sounds like something out of one of your whodunits,” said Biff.

“Quite, old boy.” Peter smiled. “Shall we give it a go?”

“I think you just want to see what the inside of the Yard looks like,” Biff said, grinning.

“Precisely,” said Peter. “And this is the first time I’ve ever had a reasonable excuse.”

“Well,” said Biff hesitantly. “I really think we ought to just take the book back to that shop, but . . .”

“Come along, old boy,” said Peter, rising from the booth.

Biff wolfed the last bite of his sandwich and followed Peter reluctantly out of the shop. As they reached the street, he stared up at the dismal brick edifice and said, “Why on earth do they call it Scotland Yard? It’s not a yard, and it’s not in Scotland.”

“Chap who owned the land the first police building

rested on was a Scot,” Peter explained. “They called that ‘Old Scotland Yard.’ Then they moved here and called it ‘New Scotland Yard,’ even though the land has no connection with the old Scotsman’s land. Clear?”

“Nope.”

“What’s more, Scotland Yard isn’t the proper name anyhow. This is the London Metropolitan Police Department. And to make it more confusing, they don’t even have responsibility for policing all of London. There’s still another force for London City.”

“Never heard of them,” said Biff.

“They don’t have a glamorous name like Scotland Yard, that’s why,” said Peter.

“Advertising pays,” said Biff.

They had crossed the street and as they approached the front of Scotland Yard, they saw a knot of people gathered there. There were quite a few women in the group, and Biff inquired, “Is this visiting day or something?”

“They’re tourists,” Peter said. “Come to visit the Black Museum.”

“What’s the Black Museum?”

“Where the Yard keeps mementos of all its famous crimes,” said Peter. “They have hundreds of murder weapons on display. A jolly journey, indeed.”

“I’ll bet,” said Biff.

The knot of people started to move, and they walked behind them down a narrow flight of stairs,

beneath eye-searing white lights, and through a huge, iron door. It was opened by a ruddy-faced man with a walrus mustache and great round-toed shoes.

“Watchastep—watchastep,” the guide chattered, as the people filed down the stairs and through the door.

“Which way to the superintendent’s office, sir?” Peter asked the guide.

The guide flashed a big, yellow-toothed smile. “Oh, come to turn yourself in, eh, Desperate Dick?”

The crowd of tourists tittered appreciatively.

Peter blushed slightly. “We have a problem—” he began.

“Don’t we all, don’t we all, lad,” boomed the guide. “But you brung ’er to the right place.” He pointed down a long office-lined hall. “The super’s down at the very end,” he said. He turned back to the tourists, winked, and said, “Now then, ladies and gents, if you’ll step lively please, we’ll have a very informative tour of the museum.” The group disappeared into a tunnel.

Biff and Peter started down the long hall festooned with metal signs sticking out like flags over the doors, identifying the occupants of each office.

“Fingerprints—Records—Special Squad. . . .” Peter read them off quietly as they walked along the hall.

Biff began to read the signs along with Peter. “Chief of Detectives—Inspector Brown—Inspector Blue—they have them in all colors—Inspector Wilson. . . .”

They were walking with their heads raised to read the signs, which was why neither one saw the lanky

man who stepped out of one of the offices. Nor did he see them, for his head was down, studying some papers in his hands.

"Inspector Duggin," read Biff—and walked straight into the man.

The man grabbed Biff's arm to keep his balance, and to Biff's surprise, said, "Yes. Did you want to see me, lads?"

The electrified mustache! The chill-blue eyes! It was Inspector Ranald Duggin—the detective who had spoken to the boys of Harley about the stolen mailbox.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Biff, thoroughly embarrassed and somewhat shaken by the unexpected appearance of the austere detective. "It was clumsy of me.

"Well, I shall be right back. Just go in and have a seat," said the detective hastily, edging away down the hall. "Must get these papers off before I can see you."

"But we—I—" Peter stammered.

"Be back in a moment," he called over his shoulder.

Peter looked at Biff and shrugged.

"Why not?" he said.

Biff looked at the inspector's retreating back. "I wonder if he recognized us?" he said.

"We were just two faces in the Harley mob," said Peter. "I doubt it."

"I thought Scotland Yard men had memories like elephants," Biff said, edging into the tiny office out of which Inspector Duggin had come. It was little more

than a cubicle with a desk, a few chairs, and some black-framed pictures on the wall.

Peter pushed in behind him and pointed to one of the pictures. "Ah, Artful Charlie," he beamed.

"Oo's 'e" Biff clowned.

"John Capstick, former superintendent of Scotland Yard," Peter said. "Called Artful Charlie because—"

"Because 'e was so bloomin' artful, right?"

"Please, sir," Peter chided. "You are speaking of one of the saints of Scotland Yard. He brought scientific detection methods to full fruit at the Yard—started the modern era of detection."

Biff stared at a man of bland countenance whose picture hung beside the ex-super.

"John George Haigh," he read from the inked caption. "Whot did 'e do?"

"Skagged six friends in five years and dissolved them in acid," said Peter.

"Ulp," said Biff.

"I say, if the inspector has Haigh's picture, he must have been the one who caught him," Peter added admiringly.

"Neville Heath," Biff read from another photo.

"Five killings," Peter murmured.

"Porter Means," Biff read from still another.

"Ex-soldier—fancied running down females on bicycles. Killed six before they caught him," said Peter calmly.

"Nice group of chums he has here," said Biff.

"Mrs. Catherine Hayes," read Peter from another picture.

Biff stared at the woman's small eyes and severe mouth.

"Looks like she'd snip your head off and never look back," Biff drawled. "What'd she do?"

"Snipped her husband's head off," said Peter.

"And never looked back," chuckled a voice behind them.

They turned to see Inspector Duggin standing in the door, a smile on his face.

"Oh! We were looking at your rogue's gallery, sir," said Peter. "Interesting."

"Old business acquaintances," the inspector said wryly. He strode to his desk, placed some papers on it, and sat down in his squeaky chair.

"Now then, lads—what was it you wanted to see me about?"

"Well, sir, my name is Peter Balsam, this is Biff Brewster." Peter stopped and sat down. Biff sat down next to him. "We have this book . . ."

"I see you have," said the inspector, starting to fill his pipe.

"And there's a sort of mystery connected with it," Peter continued.

"Ah! Mystery," said the inspector, with the ghost of a smile on his lips. "Think of mystery, and you think of Scotland Yard, right?"

"Yes, sir," said Peter. "You see, we bought this book

and didn't get what we paid for."

"That's no mystery, son." The detective smiled. "I bought a motorcar like that a few days ago."

"But I'm afraid that we got more than we paid for," insisted Peter.

"Ah, now that is a mystery," said Inspector Duggin. "How did it happen?"

Peter took a deep breath and proceeded with the story of their purchase at Frierson's. Biff noticed that Peter said nothing at all about following their shadow into the bookshop, or the man's disappearance out the back door. Peter stuck simply to the book purchase, and when he finished his story, he slid *Letters From Junius* across the table to the detective.

The detective flicked the pages of the book, and asked, "What would you suggest I do, lad?"

"Advise us on proper procedure," said Peter.

The inspector smiled. "I think it's quite simple," he said. "Take the book back."

"Oh!" said Peter, obviously expecting something far more complicated or police-like.

"Yes. The bookseller quite obviously made a mistake. If this volume is a fraction as valuable as you say, of course, he could legally recover it."

"Oh!" said Peter again.

The inspector glanced at his watch again. "And since it's getting on, you'd best hurry along before the shop closes."

Peter brightened. "I wonder, sir," he said, "since this

is such an unusual place, could you possibly go with us? That is to say, sir . . .” Peter stopped, obviously searching for a better reason why the detective should accompany them.

The ghost of a smile flickered again across the inspector’s face.

“Well, it is a long way to book row,” Peter said, “and if we should get there after it was closed, it would mean having this expensive collector’s item in our possession overnight. And with all the footpads about in the city . . .”

“Footpads! Yes, of course,” the inspector said, seeming to smother a smile behind his hand. “I haven’t heard them called that in years.”

“We are on a bicycle holiday, you see,” Biff put in, “and we’d hate to be delayed overnight in the city.”

“Of course,” the inspector agreed. “At any rate, I’d rather like to see what kind of man would hand out books worth a hundred pounds for just a few shillings.” He reached for his hat. “Come along.”

The boys jumped to their feet and followed the lanky detective out of his office and past the rows of desks. Men, busy at telephones, glanced up as the procession passed, nodding familiarly at the inspector.

They left the back of the building and walked into a large garage where the inspector motioned them toward a police cruiser. Biff and Peter climbed in beside him and in a moment were whirling up the driveway and out into London traffic.

The detective spoke cryptic words into his radio mike, apparently notifying Scotland Yard where he could be found; then he began to steer the car through some of the less densely trafficked streets in an apparent shortcut to their destination. It was evident he knew the city intimately, for in what seemed a matter of minutes, they found themselves on book row. The boys pointed out the shop where Peter had bought the book for his grandmother, and the inspector was able to park close by.

As they strolled up to the shop, the interior seemed even darker than they recalled. The detective leaned down to peer through the window.

“Are you sure this is the place?” he asked.

“Morgan Frierson,” said Biff, reading the dusty sign on the door. “Yes, this is the place.”

The detective walked to the shop door and gave the knob a turn.

“Hello,” he murmured. “Buttoned up!”

“That’s odd,” Peter said.

“I wonder if Mr. Frierson could have gone looking for us?” Biff asked.

“Not likely,” said a voice behind them.

They turned to see a thin little man standing outside the shop next door.

“Oh? Why not?” asked Inspector Duggin.

“Well, you see,” said the little man, “Mr. Frierson died awhile back. His shop hasn’t been open for a year.”

CHAPTER V

Disappearing Act

"BUT I bought this book in there today," Peter protested. "The clerk had a beard and thick glasses."

"That wasn't Mr. Frierson." The little man chuckled. "He was skinny and had a long nose. No, there must be some mistake. Mr. F. has been dead these past twelve months now. His estate's been tied up in litigation of some sort. That's why nothing has been removed from in there." The little man rubbed a spot in the grime of the glass door and peered inside. "Yes, sir," he added. "Everything just as the old man left it—filthy!" He sniffed and rubbed his nose.

"But then who did sell me this book?" Peter asked, waving the volume feebly before him.

Inspector Duggin cleared his throat and glared at the two boys. "I think this has gone far enough, lads," he said coldly. He bowed to the shopkeeper. "Thank you for your help, sir. Come along, boys."

Biff and Peter stared numbly at the darkened shop,

then at each other. Finally, they stumbled after the detective, unable to fathom the strange turn of events.

“What can we say to him?” Peter whispered, with a nod toward the inspector, who was climbing into the police cruiser.

“I think silence would be best right now,” said Biff. “I don’t like the look in his eye.”

So the boys climbed into the cruiser beside Inspector Duggin, and they headed in stony silence back toward Scotland Yard. Biff’s mind was racing to come up with some explanation which might convince the detective that they were not a couple of pranksters. For a moment, he thought of telling Duggin about the trench-coated figure who had shadowed them and whom they had followed into the bookstore, only to lose him out the back door. But that sounded as fantastic as the book business and they had even less proof of that. What was more, if there should be any question about why they thought they were being followed, they would have to bring up the stolen mailbox affair, and that would really complicate things. For if Inspector Duggin knew of their connection with that odd business, he might start believing they had some incriminating connection with both affairs, and that really would mess up their bicycle holiday. If they started talking, the inspector might learn they were from Harley and make the connection himself. In fact, if the inspector had any knowledge of school colors, he might be able to tell from their ties that they were

from Harley.

Biff's heart began to thump as he stole a glance down to see if he was wearing his school tie, and when he saw to his horror that he was, he began to perspire. But the inspector was staring straight ahead.

When they arrived at Scotland Yard, the inspector leaned across in, front of them, opened the door, and said coldly, "Good afternoon, boys."

"We're—we're awfully sorry, sir," Peter stammered.

"Let it go at that then," said the detective bluntly. "You've had your little joke—for whatever reason you schoolboys do these things. I've had my fill of schoolboy pranks this week, so be off with you, before I think of an ordinance to hold you on."

They climbed out, and the cruiser moved off.

"Well, perhaps he's color-blind," said Biff softly.

"What are you talking about?" Peter demanded.

"This," said Biff, pointing to his tie.

Peter looked down at his own chest, then clapped his hand over his cravat. "Do you think he noticed the Harley colors?"

"If he had, we'd be inside that steel chateau right now, I imagine," grinned Biff.

Peter stared at the rear end of Inspector Duggin's cruiser just disappearing into the Scotland Yard garage.

"Some sloppy detective," snorted Peter.

"Thank your lucky stars for that," said Biff. "And if we know what's good for us, we'll get back to those

bikes and get out of here before he starts recalling any details about us.”

“You know, you’re right.” Peter chuckled. “Let’s pop off.”

They hurried back to their bicycles, unlocked them, and a few minutes later were whirling off to pick up the thread of their interrupted journey southward.

It was stop-and-go cycling for quite a while, and at every stop they exchanged theories about the puzzling events of the day—the shadow who had disappeared, the man with the spade beard, and the closed bookshop. They tried valiantly to piece the puzzle together into some form that would make sense, but without success.

When they saw the sun begin to turn to a red ball ahead of them, they leaned into their pedaling, anxious to be out of London before nightfall.

Just as it was turning dark, they pedaled up before a place whose sign announced that it was the King’s Head Inn. They checked in, had a quick supper, and hurried upstairs where they fell wearily into bed.

Biff was exhausted and ready to go to sleep immediately, but Peter sat on the edge of the bed for a long time, scanning the leaves of the slim little volume which had caused them so much trouble that day. Biff could hear him mumbling to himself, as if checking the marks which could identify the book as either genuine or merely a cheap reprint of *Letters From Junius*.

Finally, Biff reached down and pulled out the cord from the light socket so as to force Peter to bed, and after a little roughhousing, they dropped wearily off to sleep.

Next morning, they shook hands on a vow to forget the whole mess of the day before and enjoy their holiday.

"And the way to kick off is with kippers," Peter announced.

"Whaters?" asked Biff.

"Kippers," the English boy repeated. "The heart of the genuine English breakfast."

"How come then, we never had kippers at Harley?" Biff asked suspiciously.

"Because at Harley they think oat porridge and skim milk are character-building," Peter snorted.

Ten minutes later, Biff sat before a plate on which lay two strips of something closely resembling fried leather.

"Identify this for me," Biff said, poking gingerly at the two red strips.

"It's sole," said Peter.

"Off whose shoes?" Biff inquired.

"Oh, no—fish—sole," Peter explained.

"What have they done to the poor things?" Biff asked. "Beside hammering all the juice out of 'em, I mean."

"Smoked them," said Peter.

"Oh! That's why they look like cigars," said Biff.

"You might try tasting one," said Peter.

Biff took a deep breath, pinched off a small piece of kipper with his fork and lifted it to his mouth. "Well," he sighed, "Columbus took a chance," and bit the piece of fish.

Peter watched his face closely for a reaction.

"Mmm," murmured Biff.

"Good?" asked Peter.

"Mm-m," droned Biff—louder now.

"What do you mean, mmm?" Peter inquired.

"Just plain mmm," said Biff. "You no *compre* mmm? It means good."

"You mean, you like the things?" Peter asked, an incredulous look on his face.

"Sure. Don't you?"

"I detest them."

"What?" Biff exclaimed. "Then what's all this about getting me to eat them?"

"It was to be a joke. You were supposed to detest them—like me. Then I was going to shame you into showing your good manners by eating the whole mess!"

Biff took another big bite of kipper and chewed happily away. "Well, this is a switch. The American tourist eats the English kippers and the English host eats—what?"

"Corn flakes," Peter grinned, "with a scoop of ice cream on them."

"How American can you get?" Biff laughed.

At noon that day, there was a similar debate about kidney pie served at a rural little inn about twenty-five miles farther along their route.

"Mmm," moaned Biff, taking his first bite.

"You mean you like this, too?" Peter marveled.

"Mmmmurder, is what I'm trying to say," Biff drawled. "This has all the flavor of a rubber glove."

"Ah! I knew I gave up on you too quickly." Peter smiled. "You have now tasted the other of my two pet peeves in English food."

"I ought to make you stand on *your* manners and eat this," scowled Biff, shoving the dish toward Peter.

"I'd fight a duel first," said Peter grimly. He raised a finger toward the waitress. "Two hamburgers— with everything," he called.

They made good time on their lightweight English bikes, and the slightly circuitous route Peter had laid out helped them avoid the heavier traffic. The roads were rarely straight for more than a mile or two, and when Biff remarked on this, Peter explained.

"Some of these property lines have remained the same since Elizabethan times. You really couldn't expect an Englishman to chop up his fields just to accommodate a ruddy automobile highway, now could you?"

"Then we are probably traveling the very same road that King Arthur and Lancelot galloped along." Biff said.

"Or their counterparts," said Peter. "Arthur is re-

garded as a myth here, you know.”

“I know, and I refuse to listen to that kind of nonsense,” Biff snorted. “Why, I understand one of your professors is trying to prove that Shakespeare was a myth.”

“True. And I wish he’d done it before I had to take that exam on ‘Old Will’ the other day,” Peter grumbled.

Though the roads were crooked, they literally spiderwebbed the landscape, and at every turn Biff saw town and village names which he could associate with stories of his childhood, or which had lent their names to towns in the United States.

Surrey was hilly country, and at the top of each rise, they would see the farmlands laid out like a great patchwork quilt before them. There were more sheep than cattle and little, if any, industry in this country. Nor had Biff seen many of the ancient buildings which he had been so eagerly anticipating.

“They’re in the next county,” Peter explained. “Hampshire—oldest one in England.”

Their schedule called for getting into Hampshire before dark, and when they saw the sun beginning to sink, they increased their speed. As dusk was drawing on, they pedaled into Basingstoke—tired to the bone and ready for a good meal and a good night’s sleep.

It had been hours since they had even thought of their misadventures of the day before. To be suddenly reminded of them came as something of a shock.

They had parked their bikes, strolled into Basingstoke Inn, and were walking toward the registration desk, when the room clerk looked up with an expression of surprise, and exclaimed:

“Well, upon my word, boys! It hasn’t been ten minutes since we had an inquiry about you.”

“Us!” said Biff, looking at Peter,

“Are you sure?” Peter added.

“Yes, he described you perfectly,” said the clerk. “Harley boys, aren’t you?”

“Yes, sir,” Peter answered. “But who was inquiring about us?”

“A quite distinguished-looking chap,” said the clerk. “He had a spade beard and wore thick glasses.”

CHAPTER VI

Back in the Soup Again

BIFF cocked his head at Peter. "Oh! Oh! Our friend from Frierson's—after his book, it appears."

"When did the gentleman say he'd be back?" Peter asked the clerk.

"He didn't say," the clerk replied, extending a pen for them to register. "Just asked if you had registered yet and then he left."

"If we had registered *yet*," Biff repeated, shooting Peter a quizzical glance. "That's odd."

"Quite," said Peter.

They finished registering, then followed the clerk up the stairs to their second-floor room. The clerk pointed out the bath at the end of the hall, unlocked their door and after going through the shade-raising, towel-counting ritual performed by hotel folk the world over, he bade them good night and closed the door quietly.

Then as one the boys said: "I've got a ques—"

They laughed, and Biff said, "Okay, you first."

"Just what you were going to ask," said Peter. "How did our bearded bookseller know where to find us?"

"You did mention something about the book being a gift for your grandmother in Devon;" said Biff. "Maybe he figured out we were on our way there."

"How could he?" Peter protested. "He never saw our bicycles."

"Do you suppose he could have discovered his mistake and run to Scotland Yard for assistance?" Biff suggested. "We did tell Inspector Duggin we were on a cycling trip to Devon."

"But his asking the room clerk if we had checked in here *yet*," Peter pointed out. "Just as if he knew we were going to stop here at this very inn."

"He'd have to be a mind reader to do that," said Biff. "Maybe the clerk just imagined he said *yet*."

"Then how about this bearded chap selling us a book out of a shop that had been closed for a year without the fellow next door knowing he had opened for business? Does that sound possible?"

"Barely possible," said Biff.

"But highly improbable," snorted Peter.

"Keep it up and you'll make a real whodunit out of this *yet*," Biff grinned. "Why, I'll bet when that bearded fellow comes back he'll have a simple explanation for the whole thing."

"Including why he let that shadow in the trench coat come in his front door and out the back?" Peter

asked.

"Sure, maybe that too," said Biff. "Look, we're on a holiday after sweating over all those hot books so long. Let's not dream up great big conundrums for ourselves."

"I say," Peter drawled, looking sharply at Biff, "you wouldn't be backing off because this is getting a little sticky, would you?"

"Oh, wouldn't I, though?" Biff retorted. "Look, bicycling is lots of fun—very healthy. Detective-type work can be very unhealthy; I know from past experience. Come on," he said, slapping Peter good-naturedly on the shoulder. "Relax and let's go eat."

The boys bathed, changed clothes and dropped down to the hotel dining room for supper. Before going in, they told the room clerk where they would be in case the bearded bookseller returned looking for them.

But the man had not appeared by the time they finished, so they returned to their room to wait for him there. They sprawled across the oversized featherbed, and Peter leafed idly through the pages of *Letters From Junius* as they expected that the bearded bookseller would surely be knocking on their door any minute now.

But he did not come.

"I simply can't understand his not coming if it really was he who asked for us," said Peter.

"Can't we wait for him in bed?" Biff yawned.

“Oh, I suppose so,” said Peter, “but I doubt that I’ll sleep a wink.”

“I will.” Biff groaned wearily.

Fifteen minutes later Peter was snoring loudly while Biff stared disgustedly down at him, unable to sleep a wink. His mind churned with the questions stirred up by the strange events of the day. Why had the bearded man asked for them, then failed to return? Why had he been gone when they went to the bookstore but was here in Basingstoke now? And who was their shadow in the trench coat who had gone in the front of the store and disappeared out the back when they started to pursue him? Biff stared into the darkness, seeking the answers. He beat the lumps out of his pillow and determined to forget it all and get some sleep. But at that moment something brought him to startled wakefulness.

There was a soft tapping at their door.

Biff sat straight up and looked down at Peter to see if he had heard. Surely if this was the bearded man at the door, he would have called from the desk downstairs before coming up.

Again the tapping—louder this time.

Biff snapped on the dim little bed light and slid out of bed. He tiptoed across the room. At the door he hesitated, hand poised above the knob, listening for the sound again. Hearing nothing, he took a deep breath and pulled open the door.

Standing there in the dimness stood a bulky,

square-jawed man in a soft hat pulled low over his eyes. A coat was thrown over one arm, and the other was upraised as though in the act of knocking once more.

“Yes?” said Biff.

The man leaned forward as if about to whisper something to Biff. But at that very moment there was a sound of footsteps in the hall behind him. The caller’s head jerked quickly around toward the sound, and Biff too leaned out to see who it might be.

A man in a dressing gown was strolling past. He had a towel over his arm and a kit of toilet articles in his hand. He was apparently on his way back from the bath down the hall. Ordinary as the stroller seemed to Biff, however, his presence appeared to bring about an agitated transformation in the caller at the door.

The man pawed drunkenly at his hat and began to sway tipsily, holding on to the door jam to steady himself. “Beg pardon,” he mumbled. Then he hiccupped and said, “Wrong room—shorry.”

With that the midnight caller turned and wove unsteadily down the hall.

“Wait!” Biff called, stepping into the hall. But the caller quickened his pace and hurried through a red-lit exit door just a few feet down the corridor.

Biff stared after the man in complete bewilderment, unable to understand what had caused this sudden transformation from evident sobriety to drunkenness. As he turned back toward his room he saw the man in

the dressing gown, standing there in the hall with a curious look on his face. Biff caught a glimpse of large, owl-like eyes and a round, swarthy face and then the man turned, walked toward one of the rooms, and disappeared inside.

Biff looked from the room the man had just entered to the spot where the midnight caller had disappeared. There was little doubt it had been the appearance of this man in the dressing gown which had seemed to send the midnight caller into the sudden drunk act—but why?

Biff walked into his room shaking his head and closed the door softly behind him.

Peter snored peacefully on.

Biff took a couple of steps toward the bed, then stopped again, a sudden recollection hitting him,, That coat over the caller's arm. It had been a trench coat! Their caller *could* have been their shadow of the day before!

Biff walked over to the bed and leaned down to shake Peter's shoulder so as to tell him what had happened, but when he saw how peacefully the English boy was snoozing he thought better of it and decided nothing could be gained by telling him about it to-night. It would keep until morning.

With that, Biff climbed between the covers and within a few minutes his snores blended with Peter's.

Next morning Biff was awake for some time before Peter. He lay there, looking over at his pal and savor-

ing the effect his story would have upon the English boy when he sprang it. He waited until Peter's eyes were fully open, and then he said casually: "I thought it ill-mannered of you not to rise and greet your guest."

"What? Who?" mumbled Peter sleepily. "Whatcha talking about?"

"Chap called last night, but never said what he wanted." Biff grinned. "Just said hiccup, or something like that."

Peter rose up on one elbow. "What in heaven's name are you raving about?" he demanded.

Biff told him—slowly and with gestures.

Peter sat up straighter and straighter as Biff's story of last night's events developed. When he finished the English boy gasped: "But it sounds like our shadow. You should have grabbed him!"

"Oh, sure!" Biff laughed. "Right around his size seventeen-and-a-half neck!"

"But I would have come running," Peter retorted.

"Oh, of course. Then he'd have had something else to crack my head against—yours!"

"But we could have found out who our shadow was and what he wanted," said Peter.

"Last night I thought he must be our shadow," said Biff, "but after sleeping on it, I'm not so sure."

"Oh? Why so?"

"Well," Biff began, "if our shadow was reluctant to have us overhaul him at the bookstore, why should he

seek us out last night?”

“Jove, that’s right,” said Peter, scratching his head. “Then what do you think it adds up to?”

“Well, one and one certainly make two—two chaps on our trail—trench coat and black beard.”

“Both chasing us, yet not chasing too hard,” added Peter.

“Yet knowing just exactly where to find us,” Biff finished.

“All of which adds up to just one conclusion that I can see,” said Peter.

“I’ll bet we both have the same idea,” Biff said

“They know our itinerary,” said Peter.

“Good adding.” Biff smiled.

“Want some more addition?” Peter asked.

“Shoot.”

“Somebody learned our itinerary the only way it could have been learned—by reading it in the letter I posted to my dad—the one I posted in the stolen post-box.”

“Now that,” Biff beamed, “is what I call adding with gas!”

CHAPTER VII

Object: Confusion

THEY climbed out of bed and began their preparations for breakfast. As they did, Peter exclaimed: "You know, the more we add, the faster the questions multiply. I can see why old Brush Face might want to catch up with us and I'm dashed if I can understand why he didn't; but why is that fellow in the trench coat playing coy with us and panicking off down the hall when a guest in a dressing gown wanders by?"

Biff gave an unintelligible answer from behind the towel on which he was drying his face.

"I'm sure he wasn't a Scotland Yard man," Peter said. "A Yard man wouldn't act like that in public, if Inspector Duggin is any example. So who was our caller and what—"

"Look! Let's do our who, what, why, where, and whening over a good breakfast, what say?" Biff drawled.

"Some Sherlock Holmes you are," Peter chided. "A

little thing like food never occurred to him when he was on a case."

"Yes, and look how skinny Holmes was," Biff retorted. "Let's head for the chow line!"

They jumped into their clothes and a few minutes later were in the dining room giving their breakfast orders to the waitress. As they handed back the menus, Peter suddenly exclaimed: "Biff! Do you suppose the fellow in the trench coat could have been sent by old Brush Face to collect his book for him?"

"But why?" Biff answered. "If the book is as valuable as you seem to think it is and if our bearded buddy followed us all the way to Basingstoke to retrieve it, why wouldn't he come get it himself?"

"True," Peter admitted. "But they both knew where to find us. That seems to connect trench coat and black beard in my mind. Especially if the caller last night was the same chap who went in the front and out the back of black beard's bookstore." Peter paused. "But then, you think he wasn't the same chap, don't you?"

"I don't know," Biff replied. "I never did see our shadow's face to compare it with the man's last night."

"Confound it!" Peter snapped. "I wish one or both would stop playing coy and just come out and say what it is they want with us."

"Well, they know where to find us," Biff said, looking fondly at the plate of kippers and eggs the waitress was setting before him.

Peter snapped his fingers and grabbed Biff's fork hand. "Biff! That's it!" he said.

"Leggo, I'm starving," Biff complained, freeing his hand. "What's this *it* you're talking about?"

"They know where to find us because they know where we're going."

"So?"

"So, let's not go there."

"You mean change our itinerary?"

"Why not?"

"Why not indeed?" Biff grinned. "That should definitely confuse 'em."

"So it should, poor things," said Peter, happily starting on his own breakfast. "Jove, we'll make a capital whodunit out of this yet, Sherlock."

Fifteen minutes later they had finished their breakfast and checked out of the inn. Biff had the feeling of eyes boring into his back with every move they made. But as they pedaled slowly away from the inn in the early-morning mist, they saw no sign of pursuit; indeed, little sign of anyone on the road at that hour. When they had reached the outskirts of Basingstoke, they left the main road and took the fork that pointed to the villages of Nutley, Preston Candover, and Brown Candover.

This was Hampshire, oldest of English counties, with some of the most ancient monastic remains and relics to be found anywhere in the domain. In one abbey, they saw brasses commemorating obscure

English historical events of the years before America was even discovered. In one old Norman castle, they saw armor which actually had been worn by warriors in some long-forgotten battles. Biff was struck by the relative smallness of the armor, testimony to how much the average human frame had grown since the days when knighthood was in flower.

When they came to a sign pointing toward Winchester, Peter reminded Biff, with a smile, that this had been one of King Arthur's capitals.

Hampshire was largely rural in character, with the kind of picture postcard views Biff had always visualized when thinking of England.

Having been brought up in a country where newness was a standard, Biff was enthralled by the dates on some of the buildings they visited—dates going back to before Plymouth Rock, before Jamestown, before Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett and the other heroes, whom until now, Biff had thought of as ancient. What he was seeing, Biff realized, were the really ancient roots of American civilization—the very buildings and homes and towns from whence had come the founders of America.

In these churches, these castles, these ancient homes, had been born the original ideas concerning personal freedom which had led to the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and a type of representative government which the United States had developed into a model for all the world.

It was a wonderful, meandering journey, full of names that were like a story of England's past: Fitz-Osburn and De Port, Warwick and Montgomery—men whose names now hung over inns or tea shops, but who once owned vast tracts of countryside and ruled whole shires and warred bloodily with competing land pirates in the next shire. It was the partly mythical, partly real King Arthur who, with his notions of chivalry, had made the first move toward civilized combat from his stronghold in Cornwall, and started this island full of petty barons on its way to a union that was to spread its ideas and influence over all the earth.

Peter was able to get his fill too, of the strange and macabre. For there were scores of mansions and castles to explore—each with its very own skeleton in the closet, so to speak. Though the British might forget some of the historical facts regarding certain buildings, they never seemed to forget the details of the skullduggery which had taken place in these old structures. There were ghost stories and tales of terrible mayhem related at almost every crumbling abode they visited. And at one old home, there was even a picture of the household ghost descending the staircase, said to have been taken by a news photographer just a few years before, and defying explanation by all scientific authorities.

Then there were the castles sprouting TV antennas and the mansions which had become girls' schools or

headquarters for a Rural Electric Authority, the only one which in this day could afford to maintain such great, sprawling edifices.

The boys found a small cheese factory, bought wedges of wonderful English cheddar, stopped at a little village bake shop to buy fresh, warm bread, and carried it to the bank of a gurgling stream where they washed the wonderful food down with fresh Guernsey milk bought at a farm nearby.

"That gives me an idea for tonight," Peter said, looking across the meadow at the hay-stuffed barn.

"What idea?" Biff asked.

"We'll do as the regular British tourist does. We'll sleep in a barn tonight."

"Well, it would definitely eliminate any chance of midnight callers knocking on our door," said Biff.

"Quite," said Peter.

Biff studied his sandwich for a moment, then said: "I wonder who he was and what he started to say?"

"We may never know now," Peter replied, "what, with changing our itinerary and all."

"It seemed like a cute" idea at the time," said Biff, "but I wonder if we did right? After all, if *Letters From Junius* is valuable that fellow in the bookstore should have it back by all rights."

"I suppose," said Peter. "But look here, we did wait all last evening for him. I'm beginning to think he doesn't really want the book."

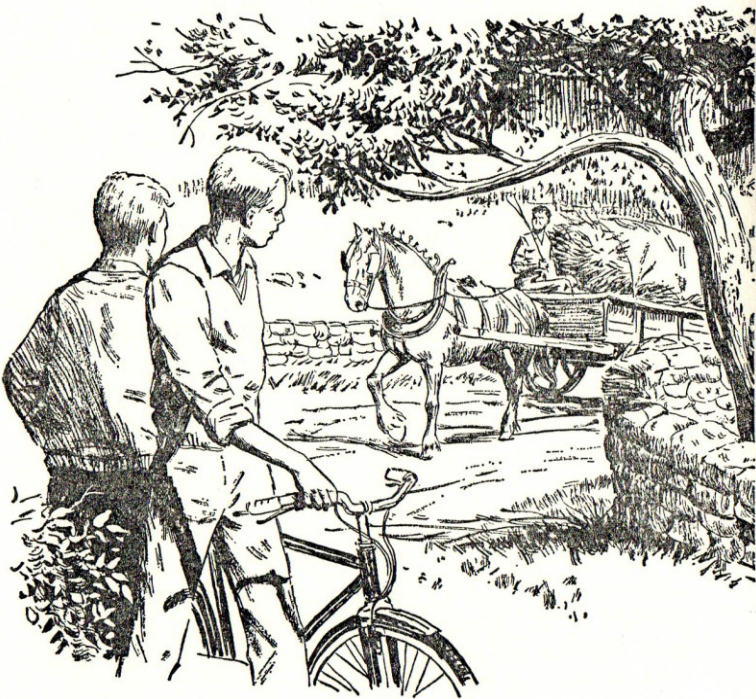
"At least not right now, eh?" drawled Biff.

The casual remark made no impact on the boys at first, but slowly their eyes rose and met in a gaze of mutual discovery.

"By George, you may have struck on something!" exclaimed Peter. "It could be he's waiting for some particular time to claim his book."

"That just adds another X to the equation," said Biff. "X, the unknown quantity."

"My dad's good with equations," said Peter. "Perhaps when we get to Edensboro he'll help us figure this one out. Although I don't imagine he'll appreciate having us hand him any more problems right now."



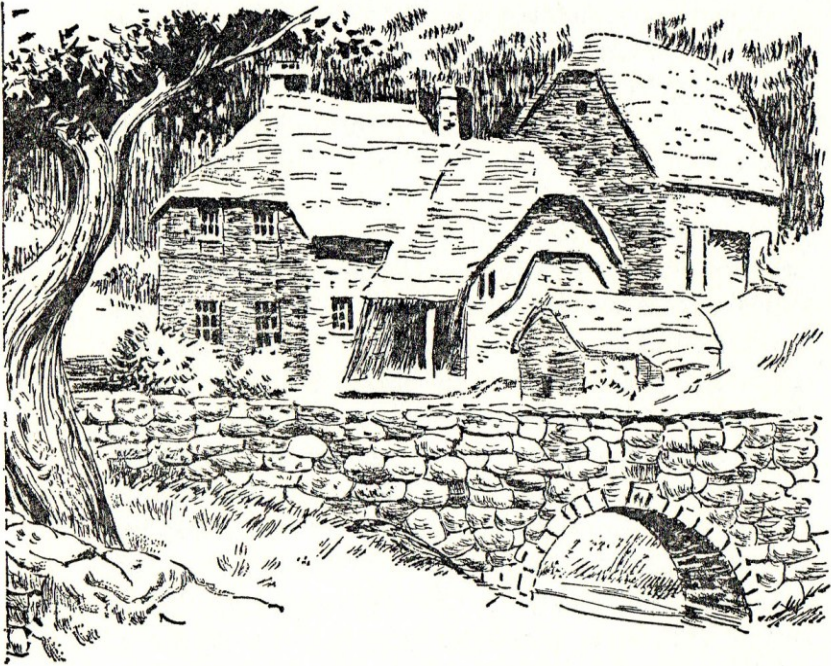
“Not with the ore extraction problem he and my dad are wrestling with, eh?”

“Plus the bugs he has run into in building the atomic space engine,” Peter added.

“Oh, is that the project at Edensboro?” said Biff. “I never did ask. I know how these security things are.”

“It’s for interplanetary space travel,” said Peter. “The country’s top secret project right flow.”

“Well, perhaps we’ll have this thing all figured out before we get to Edensboro and won’t have to bother our dads with it,” said Biff, rising to his feet and gazing across the stream toward the farm and barn.



"We don't have time to worry about it right now anyway," said Peter. "For the next few minutes you have some work cut out for you, my lad—that is if we're going to get to sleep in that barn tonight."

"Work? What work?" Biff asked.

"I've heard you boast about your deft touch with a fly rod on those streams of yours at home. Suppose you get it out of your saddlebag and see what luck you can have catching some really smart English trout. We'll need them to barter for a night's lodging in yon haymow."

"Forsooth and 'twill be done forthwith," said Biff, eying the clear stream flowing placidly by below them. "That is, I hope."

He strode to his saddlebag, removed his fly rod sections and after fitting them together started looking about at the stream's edge, to see what natural food the fish might be feeding upon at this particular time of day. He noted a few insects floating about on the water and reached into his tackle box for a small, black fly which he strung on the end of a long, spidery leader. He removed his shoes and waded into the stream and began casting. Again and again his line floated out without success. Peter's raucous remarks from the bank made him decide that he needed to drop his fly on to the water more softly so as not to frighten the wily trout in the clear water. A moment later he had his first strike, but it was a mild one and he missed his fish. But the next strike was a hard one

and he set the hook and hauled in his first catch—a plump, German Brown trout. Within fifteen minutes he had caught two more about the same size.

“Hold, good knight!” Peter called down to him. “’Tis enough, enow. We may get bed and board for these.”

Biff took a long, deep bow for his efforts and waded out of the stream to put on his shoes and socks. Peter wrapped the trout in some of the paper their bread had been wrapped in and after tidying up their camp site they mounted their bikes and pedaled along the narrow road toward the farmhouse and the barn in the distance.

The farmer, a rotund man with apple cheeks told them he would be happy to let them sleep in his barn so long as they promised to light no matches. The boys promised that they would not, then offered him the three trout which he accepted gratefully, saying that since he had so little time to fish, the trout would indeed be a treat for him.

Arriving at the barn, they hollowed out a bed for themselves in the hay and after finishing the last of their bread and cheese, burrowed down into the fragrant straw and joined the chickens and the Guernseys, who were preparing for their night’s slumber.

Only once during the long night did they hear anything save the stirring of the animals. Once they heard the sound of an automobile motor in the direction of the big house. But it soon left, and they fell happily

back to sleep.

Next morning the sound of milking woke them, and as they slid out of the haymow, the farmer smiled at them and pointed toward a big, overflowing horse trough beneath a pump.

"That's where all the hikers wash up, lads," he said.

They thanked him and began to get their toilet articles from the saddlebags on their bikes.

"Never rains but it pours," said the farmer, looking up from his milking. "We had another guest after you lads went to bed."

"Oh?" said Biff.

"Yes—police chap. Wanted to use the phone, he did. Called the Yard. Said his car radio wouldn't reach this far from London."

Biff and Peter straightened up as one.

"Scotland Yard?" asked Peter.

"Righto," said the farmer. "Couldn't help overhearing him. It was the Yard all right. And he looked every inch a Yard man with that bristly mustache and those cold blue eyes, I can tell you."

The farmer moved on to the next cow as Peter and Biff stared at each other.

"Cold blue eyes!" said Peter.

"Mustache!" said Biff.

"Guess who?" said Peter.

"Who else?" said Biff.

CHAPTER 71

Destination: Edensboro

THEY strolled to the water trough to be out of earshot of the farmer.

“Well, if the Yard wasn’t on our trail before, it apparently is now,” said Peter.

“Maybe he just makes three,” said Biff.

“I don’t know whether I’d care to have that Inspector Duggin catch up with us or not,” Peter said, grinning. “Perhaps we’d better give ourselves up and confess all.”

Biff grew serious. “I know you’re in your glory in the middle of all this whodunit stuff, Pete,” he said, “but I think it’s time to turn this little algebra problem over to our dads.”

“You may be right,” said Peter soberly.

“How far is it to Edensboro?” Biff asked.

“Two days of hard cycling,” Peter replied.

“I don’t think we should wait two days to tell our dads about this business,” said Biff.

"We could go back to Scotland Yard," said Peter hopefully.

"That's two days in the other direction," Biff said. "And I'm like you—not too anxious about starting all over with Inspector Duggin."

"Amen," said Peter dryly. "Then Edensboro it is. By bus. We can catch one at Romney, just down the road from here."

After thanking the farmer for his hospitality, they packed their gear, mounted their bikes and raced down the road toward Romney. They had time for a quick breakfast before the bus arrived and when it pulled in they piled their bikes on the luggage carrier atop the vehicle and clambered aboard. Finding two seats in the rear, they dropped into them as the bus pulled out.

"How long to Edensboro did the driver say?" Biff inquired.

"This bus goes as far as Exeter," said Peter. "We have a short bike haul from there to the lab."

"Then I'll have time for a nap," sighed Biff, sinking down into the seat. "That cow next to me rolled and tossed all night."

"I believe Sherlock Holmes occasionally took naps in the middle of his big cases," Peter drawled.

"That's me," said Biff. "You be Dr. Watson for this whodunit."

"And just to make it complete, you'll be interested to know we're going to the locale of one of Holmes's

most famous cases.”

Biff opened one eye. “Where?”

“Dartmoor,” said Peter.

“The moor,” Biff croaked melodramatically, “barren and windswept, shrouded in mist and haunted by the eerie baying of The Hound of the Baskervilles.”

“You know your Holmes stories,” Peter said.

“Elementary, my dear Watson,” said Biff. “But remind me not to wander out on that moor while we’re down that way.”

“Edensboro is at the tip of an inlet that’s close by the moor,” said Peter, “but we don’t have any reason for going there.”

“Good,” Biff groaned. “Now if you’ll be quiet for about the next six hours I’ll grab a wink or two.”

“Of course, Sherlock,” Peter replied. “Now please allow me a little room on this seat.”

For a long while they rode without speaking—content to watch the scenery slide by. Village after village came and went—Ower, Cadnum, Tolpuddle, Winborne Minster, Corte Mullen—quaint little names left behind by the multitude of races who had conquered Britain and been conquered in return, leaving only traces of their languages behind on the map of England: The Romans, the Celts, the Cornish, the Normans, the Saxons, all contributors to the melting pot that made up the English language and customs.

Then came Dorchester and surprise.

Dorchester had been one of the towns on their itin-

erary before they had decided to depart from it at Basingstoke. There was a ten-minute stop there, and after getting out to stretch and have a quick cup of tea, the boys returned to their seats and were staring idly out the window when Biff found his attention drawn to the figure of a man just coming out of the bus station' door. His hands were cupped to his face, lighting a cigarette. But something about his eyes, the slope of his stooping shoulders, seemed familiar to Biff. When the man withdrew his cupped hands from his face, Biff's heart gave a little jump, and he clutched Peter's arm.

"Pete. That man in the door there."

Peter glanced out toward the man. "What about him?" he asked.

"He's the one who was out in the hall in his dressing gown the night the man in the trench coat called on us."

Peter took a closer look. "Are you sure?" he asked.

"Almost posi—" Biff began. But before he could finish, his eye was drawn to still another figure just starting around the end of the bus station building. The man had taken only two steps when he stopped as though startled, then backed up, and stood just around the corner from the other man.

"No—I *am* positive," said Biff. "Because there's the other fellow who was out in the hall that night. Our midnight visitor in the trench coat!"

The bus had started to move. Peter was leaning

across in front of Biff, keeping the two men in sight. "I'll be dashed," he said. "What do you make of it?"

Biff shrugged his shoulders in bewilderment and stared. At that moment, the suave man in the station doorway exhaled a plume of smoke, shoved his hands in his jacket pocket, and strolled away, up the platform. As he did, the trench-coated man stepped out from his place of concealment and fell in step behind the smoker.

Then the bus turned a corner, and the two men were lost from sight.

"Well," said Biff. "It's getting so you can't tell the players without a program. Now who's following whom?"

"And what were they doing in this particular bus station along our route?" added Peter.

"And other assorted questions too numerous to mention," said Biff.

"Getting jolly interesting, isn't it?" Peter smiled.

"Getting too interesting," said Biff. "We've got enough characters in this thing already, without adding that guy in the dressing gown. Now, how does he fit into this?"

"Jams up our addition, what?" said Peter.

"It sure does," Biff agreed. "In fact, it's getting into higher mathematics now."

Two hours later the bus driver announced:

"Exeter—all out for Exeter!"

They debarked, retrieved their bikes from atop the

bus, and in a few minutes were pedaling through the streets of the ancient city. Exeter was on the estuary of the river Exe and only a few miles from the English Channel into which the river emptied. Edensboro was located on the estuary of a smaller river farther down the coast, which on the map looked like the long, scraggly finger of a witch poking back into the coastline. Edensboro lay at the tip of this finger, and behind it lay Dartmoor.

They pedaled southward for a while, enjoying the richness of the red Devon earth, so different from the blackness of the ground to the east. The air was more humid here, the vegetation more lush. And as the boys cycled deeper into the countryside, they traveled on roads sunk below the level of the bordering fields, worn down by the wheels of more than a thousand years of history. Hedges bordered the edge of the road, and in places the boughs of trees formed an arch overhead. It seemed as if they were traveling through long, dim tunnels. There was even the glimpse of an occasional thatched hut which is becoming rare in this day and time.

They had been traveling for some time with a rather formless black plateau dominating the horizon to their right, and the smell of the Channel wafted to them from their left. Peter had stopped at road intersections a couple of times to check his map, saying, "No use looking for Edensboro signs. They don't encourage visitors there."

Each turn had seemed to bring them closer and closer to the haze-shrouded hulk looming into the sky, and finally Biff asked what it was.

“The moor,” said Peter.

What Biff had been expecting, he didn’t know. Perhaps something more sinister, more distinctive. At this distance, of course, it was difficult to tell anything of the nature of the place, except that it seemed almost lifeless compared to the deep green of the fields stretching out toward its base. It was difficult to conceive of this as being the forbidding and mysterious terrain which British mystery writers have used as a locale for tales of suspense and murder.

Just then, Peter whistled sharply and pointed toward a road ahead. They turned off and started down a long, winding slope that seemed to be leading toward the ocean. Great cedars lined the road, and huge granite boulders lay strewn about. They crossed two tumbling streams spanned by solid stone bridges. Here they stopped to get a drink.

“I didn’t realize it was quite this far,” Peter puffed. “It’s getting dark.”

“Maybe we should have called the lab from Exeter and had them come and pick us up,” said Biff.

“They’re probably too busy,” said Peter.

“Let’s get on with it then.” Biff grinned. “No sense wandering around out here in the dark.”

They climbed back on their bikes and pedaled onward. Only, this time, they apparently had taken a

wrong turn—for after a half hour's pedaling, they found themselves back at the bridge where they had had their drink.

“My fault,” said Peter. “I know where I went wrong.”

So they headed up a different road. But now it was dusk, and they knew they had better get to their destination in a hurry or be traveling in total darkness.

They had just coasted down a winding slope and were turning a curve beyond another stone bridge, when something happened which caused them to slam on their brakes and slide to a sudden stop.

The sky ahead of them suddenly lit up with a strange, flickering, reddish light, and to their ears came a terrifying, high-pitched scream!

CHAPTER IX

Suspicion Confirmed

BIFF'S mouth was dry. He stared at Peter. For a moment they were transfixed by the high, unearthly howl and the strange light over the next rise—but then Peter said hoarsely, "I think I know. Come on."

He led the way up the short rise with Biff close behind. The English boy got to the top first, and as he did, he looked back at Biff with a smile and pointed ahead.

"There's our screaming banshee," he said.

Biff reached the top of the rise and looked ahead to where Peter was pointing.

Below them, the road wound away toward a broad, flat expanse of rock on the edge of a wide inlet from the sea. The rocky plain ended in cliffs that dropped off abruptly into the water. Perched on the edge of the sheer cliffs stood a massive stone building with great turrets rising into the sky.

The hideous scream seemed to come from within

the building, and the strange, flickering light emanated from one of the windows of the huge structure.

“Welcome to Edensboro,” Peter smiled.

“But that noise—that light! What is it?” Biff asked.

“The atomic space engine, idiot,” said Peter. “What’d you think it was, the Hound of the Baskervilles?”

“He’s over *that* way.” Biff grinned, pointing back in the direction of the moor.

Peter glanced toward the moor automatically, then did a double take and looked again.

“Well, apparently the spirit of the moor is a little jealous,” he said. “Look out there.”

Biff looked away toward the distant haziness of the moor. There, unmistakably flickering in the dusk, was an almost answering light winking on and off—not quite as bright, not the same color, but a light nevertheless.

“They say there’s some will-o’-the-wisp on the moor that they have never been able to identify,” said Peter. “First time I’ve ever seen it.”

“Well, shall we stand here watching these two places winking at each other, or shall we get on to Edensboro?” asked Biff.

They remounted their bikes and with Peter leading the way once more they sped down the winding road toward the great stone structure hulking in the twilight ahead of them.

Even in the dusk Biff could see that the great laboratory was surrounded by a high, barbed-wire fence. At each corner of the fence was a blockhouse bristling with what appeared to be spotlights and gun emplacements.

“Looks like Sing Sing,” Biff called out to Peter.

“Except security here is a little tighter!” Peter shouted back.

And almost as if to prove his statement a shaft of light suddenly stabbed out from one of the blockhouses, bathing them in a glow which followed them eerily across the plain toward the gate of Edensboro.

“I hope they’re not waiting until they can see the whites of our eyes,” Biff drawled.

“Pardon?” said Peter.

“It’s an American joke—having to do with Bunker Hill,” said Biff. “Forget it.”

“I believe that’s best,” said Peter. “These security chaps in the towers aren’t much for jokes.”

They pedaled the last fifty yards to the fence with the spotlight following them silently every inch of the way. When they reached the gate they stopped before one of the massive stone pillars, and Biff said: “Now what?”

Before Peter could reply Biff received his answer.

A metallic voice from a speaker imbedded within the pillar said: “What is your business, please?”

“I’m Peter Balsam, the director’s son,” Peter replied, facing the speaker. “This is Biff Brewster. His dad is

visiting here.”

There was a pause, and then the voice said: “You’re right on time, lads.”

“No, two days early,” Peter replied.

Biff thought he heard a chuckle from the speaker in the pillar. “Just wanted to see if you knew the right answer, lad,” said the voice. “Your dads told us to expect you.”

Peter winked at Biff and waved toward the block-house. A few minutes later they saw a door open in the great stone laboratory, and two figures started across the yard toward the gate.

It was their dads.

“You rascals!” boomed a bushy-haired man whom Peter introduced as his father. “You shook up our whole security force with this early arrival.”

“Yes,” said Tom Brewster, putting an arm around Biff. “Why the early arrival?”

Biff introduced Peter and said: “Pete had a little algebra problem he wanted you to help him work out.”

Sir Charles cocked an eye at his son. “What’s this? Nothing wrong at school, I trust?”

“Oh, no.” Peter smiled. “It’s just that we have a little homework to do.”

“It sounds cryptic and mysterious, I’m sure,” said Sir Charles. “But can it wait until after we dine? We were just starting for dinner when you arrived.”

“*Anything* can wait for dinner,” Biff declared.

“Come along then,” said Sir Charles, and he led

them back across the yard and through the door of the great stone building. Biff was certain this was an ancient stone castle which had been converted to serve as a laboratory both because of its size and its isolated location, so necessary to work of the type carried on here. They were shown where to tidy up and when they'd finished, Sir Charles and Tom Brewster led them through high-domed passageways into a great dining hall. Except for electric lights and a few other modern conveniences, the great oaken dining tables could have been serving plumed knights of old rather than the two score lab workers assembled in the hall.

Biff was fascinated by the immense, high arches, the dark wood paneling, and the huge stone walls of the converted castle. It was easy to see how the British had become used to living in a state of perpetual chill. Nothing short of a blast furnace could have kept these cavernous old stone structures warm—certainly not the numerous fireplaces, despite the fact that they were big enough to consume whole tree trunks.

Biff decided that this must be why Englishmen had grown up regarding the sound of chattering teeth as normal and could not now abide house heat much above freezing.

On this fall evening, the dining room air was traditionally brisk, but none of the assembled British scientists seemed to notice it at all.

The boys had just been seated with their fathers at

one of the great oak tables, when the spare, bent figure of a man in black-rimmed glasses, started to pass.

“Oh, Stringbourne,” Sir Charles called. “You remember my son Peter, of course.”

“Oh, yes. How are you, Peter?” said the man named Stringbourne. He poked back a lock of hair with the stem of his pipe. “How’s school, Peter?” he asked in a reedy, rather weary voice.

“Good as can be expected, sir,” Peter replied, smiling. “This is my friend, Biff Brewster.”

“Oh! Your son, eh, Tom?”

“Yes. Dropped in unexpectedly,” said Biff’s dad, “with a deep, dark mystery for us to solve.”

Stringbourne cocked an eyebrow at Peter. “Up to your old tricks, Peter?” he said.

“Sounds suspiciously like it to me,” Sir Charles put in. “Here, sit down and lend us your broad talents while we hear them out, will you?”

“If I’m not intruding,” said Stringbourne, seating himself with the group.

“On the contrary,” said Sir Charles. “Your many interests may come in handy. Boys, in addition to being an atomic physicist, Mr. Stringbourne is also a geologist, a gunsmith, and an amateur bibliophile.”

“A what?” asked Biff.

“Rare book expert,” said Sir Charles.

Biff and Peter looked at each other and laughed.

Stringbourne looked at the two boys over his glasses. “First time I’ve gotten a laugh with that.

What's so amusing?"

"It's just quite a coincidence," said Peter. "A rare book happens to be part of our mystery."

Sir Charles heaved a deep sigh. "Well, I suppose you won't be content until you get it off your chest. Dinner won't be here for a while, so carry on. Let's hear it."

"Shall I tell them, or will you?" Peter asked Biff.

"You start," Biff said. "I'll fill in the parts I know."

Peter forthwith launched dramatically into the story of the strange sequence of events in which he and Biff had become involved. He told of the stolen mailbox; the man¹ in the trench coat; the adventure at the bookstore; and how the boys returned with Inspector Duggin to find the place locked. Biff then took over to tell of the midnight visit by the trench-coated man, with the man in the dressing gown looking on; and then of seeing the same two men at the bus station in Dorchester. The boys concluded their story by telling of their stop at the farm; how a Scotland Yard man dropped by to use the phone while they slept; and their conviction that this was Inspector Duggin out looking for them..

When they had finished, Peter said, "Dad, we felt that all this added up to something. What do you think?"

Sir Charles rested his chin on his steepled fingers, as if digesting the dramatic narrative. "What do you think, Tom?" he asked Biff's father.

Mr. Brewster shrugged. "There's certainly a mass of

circumstantial evidence—but leading where?” he asked.

Sir Charles looked at Stringbourne. “What do you say to all this, old fellow?” he asked.

The pale scientist sucked on his pipe for a moment, then said, “I believe this brocade of happenstance has as its keystone, one thing—the book. If the book is not really rare then the whole thing collapses, doesn’t it?”

“Well put,” said Sir Charles. “Peter, where is this amazing book?”

Peter had removed the *Letters From Junius* from his saddlebag and brought the book along. He handed the volume to Stringbourne.

The scientist laid his pipe on the table and folded back the cover of the book.

Biff couldn’t be sure, but it seemed to him that Stringbourne’s eyes flickered for just an instant when he looked at the first page.

“Hallo,” said Sir Charles. “You gave a little start there, Stringbourne. See anything?”

Biff looked sharply at the scientist, but he was all cool composure now.

“It’s difficult to make quick judgments about these things,” he said. They watched him flick the pages for a few moments, and then he said: “Do you mind if I take this to my quarters and examine it in a better light?”

“Do so by all means, eh, Peter?” said Sir Charles.

“Of course, sir,” said Peter.

Stringbourne rose from the table. "I shan't be long," he murmured, still studying the book.

"I say," said Sir Charles as the scientist hurried across the dining hall. "He didn't even eat his dinner."

"Absent-minded professor." Mr. Brewster chuckled.

Sir Charles still stared at the doorway through which Stringbourne had disappeared. "A strange, dedicated fellow," he murmured. "So like him to forget everything when a problem presents itself."

"He hasn't stirred from the lab since I arrived, has he?" Tom Brewster inquired.

"Hasn't left for months," replied Sir Charles. "It's just work, work, work with the man. Stalks the halls most of the night purring that pipe and talking to himself, as it were. Our security chief here has the nervous fidgets running into him at all hours."

"He's been of incredible help on the ore extraction problem," said Biff's father, "A genius, no question about it."

"How are you coming with that, Dad?" Biff asked.

"I believe we have it licked now," said Tom Brewster.

"I wish I could say the same about the space engine itself," said Sir Charles.

"Would it be possible to see the engine while we're here, sir?" Biff asked.

"Yes, but first do you mind if we dine and forget problems for a while? Brings on my dyspepsia, don't you know."

"I'll second the motion," said Biff, casting a welcoming eye on the huge trays of food being brought to their table by white-coated waiters.

They were served and for the next half hour exchanged small talk about school, their trip, and plans for continuing on to Peter's grandmother's at Hatherleigh in Devonshire. Mr. Brewster assured Biff that he would have time to make the trip with Peter before Mrs. Brewster and the twins arrived in England.

"Wish we could take Mr. Stringbourne along," said Peter impulsively. "He looks as if he could stand an outing."

"Quite," said Sir Charles, "but we can't seem to interest him in anything beyond these walls any more."

"What's Stringbourne's background?" Mr. Brewster asked. "Family, education, and so on, I mean."

"His father was a civil servant of some sort. Hauled poor Stringbourne and his mother all over Europe while he was growing up. Believe she was Rumanian, Armenian—something of that sort. Stringbourne went to school in half a dozen countries. Has degrees from three European universities."

"He has an amazing mathematical mind, no doubt about that," said Tom Brewster.

"Here, here, what are we doing discussing business?" said Sir Charles. "I imagine Biff is ready for his guided tour, eh what, son?"

"Yes, sir," said Biff enthusiastically.

The two men rose from the table, and the boys fell

in behind them as Sir Charles led the way across the dining hall and out through a door that led to the lower levels of the huge old castle.

During their stroll, Biff was impressed with the extreme security measures employed at Edensboro. The laboratory was blocked off into activity areas, with passes required for movement from one area to another. The high priority status of Sir Charles's badge enabled their little sight-seeing party to move about with ease. When they reached the area where the space engine itself was located, they were passed through three separate doors before they stood on the catwalk high above the mammoth creation.

It was unlike any engine Biff had ever seen, but he knew he was not to ask any details regarding its construction. It gave Biff a proud feeling, however, to realize that this engine, which might one day propel men across space to distant planets, received its propulsive power from a radioactive metal refined from the very ore which his dad had helped discover.

"Handsome," murmured Tom Brewster, admiring the bulky machine.

"Handsome as the devil and temperamental as a prima donna," said Sir Charles. "Stringbourne is having trouble solving the excessive emission loss."

"That reminds me," said Peter. "I wonder if Mr. Stringbourne has decided anything about the book?"

"I have," said a voice behind them.

They turned to see Stringbourne walking toward

them with the book in his hand.

“What say?” asked Sir Charles.

“Interesting,” said Stringbourne matter-of-factly.
“The book appears to be a genuine first edition.”

CHAPTER X

The Retriever

“WELL, Dad!” Peter exclaimed. “What do you say now?”

“What can I say except—” Sir Charles examined the book Stringbourne had handed him. “Incredible.”

Peter took the book from his father and said: “Then if this is a first edition, I wonder why in the world that bearded chap didn’t come to collect it after asking about us in Basingstoke?”

“I’m not as adept at these whodunits as you are,” said Sir Charles. “I’m afraid I can’t say.”

“But of course the book should be returned,” Stringbourne said.

“Of course,” said Sir Charles. “I would suggest returning it first thing in the morning.”

“But we tried once,” Peter protested.

“Then try again,” Sir Charles answered.

“And if the bookstore is still closed, should we take it to Scotland Yard?” Peter asked hopefully.

Stringbourne snatched the book from Peter's hand. "The very idea of allowing a common policeman to manhandle a volume as precious as this," he declared. "Why, it's unthinkable!"

The boys and their fathers looked at the suddenly aroused Stringbourne in astonishment.

"I—I'm sorry," said the slight scientist, fighting for composure. "I shouldn't have burst out so. But I'm certain the owner of this volume is as dedicated a bibliophile as I, and I'm certain he wouldn't appreciate his property being turned over to the heavy hand of the law."

"I suppose not," said Sir Charles, still slightly taken back by the outburst from the normally placid Stringbourne. "Well then, Peter—back to the bookstore, first thing in the morning, eh?"

"Yes, Dad," said Peter.

"Now then, I'll show you boys to your quarters," said Peter's father. "I imagine you're both tired after your long trip."

The boys agreed that they were and followed the lab director out of the atomic engine room and back through the dim halls to a room which had been set aside for them. They bade Stringbourne and their dads good night and after quick showers, tumbled into their beds.

"Well, I guess you feel pretty expert after having Stringbourne confirm your judgment about *Letters From Junius*, eh, Pete?" said Biff, settling under the

covers.

"I suppose so," said Peter calmly, holding up the book and examining its cover. "Imagine a man being so careless with a book so valuable."

"Let me touch this fabulous book," Biff said, reaching for the volume and opening it gingerly lest he tear one of its pages. "How do you tell if a book is valuable?" he asked.

"Oh, the type, the paper, certain imperfections," said Peter. "Of course I'm only repeating what I've heard Grandmother say."

"I suppose watermarks help too, eh?" said Biff.

"I don't believe they watermarked paper when this one was printed," said Peter.

"That's odd," said Biff. "There's a watermark on this page." He held it up to the light.

Peter sat straight up in bed. "Let me see that," he said excitedly. He clambered out of bed, took the book from Biff's hands, and examined the single page against the light. He took a long look, then slowly lowered the book and gave Biff a puzzled stare. "I'm almost certain there was no means of watermarking paper at the time this book was printed," said Peter.

"Strange Stringbourne didn't know that," said Biff.

"Of course he could have missed it, as I did," said Peter, "but if he's the expert Dad says he is, it would seem like a strange oversight."

"Then of course you could be wrong about the watermark business," said Biff.

"I wish Grandmother could see this," said Peter. "In fact, I believe I'll make sure she does see it."

"Wait a minute," said Biff. "We're supposed to take the book straight back to Frierson's, remember?"

"Dad said take it back." Peter grinned. "But he didn't say *straight* back."

"But what if you are right and Stringbourne's wrong?" said Biff. "Where are we then?"

"Back in the whodunit business," Peter grinned.

"Just when I thought we were going back to plain old bicycling," Biff complained.

"Not yet, Sherlock," said Peter, sinking happily back on to his pillow. "We'll just have to get ready to do some more complicated adding if I'm right."

"You, Dr. Watson, are going to get us in deep trouble yet," said Biff.

His only answer was a loud, artificial snore from the other bed.

Next morning at breakfast Sir Charles and Tom Brewster were hunched over some complicated looking papers and hadn't much to say to the boys beyond perfunctory greetings. The boys were halfway through their breakfast when Peter said to his father: "I imagine it would be all right if we took the book back to Frierson's by way of Grandmother's, eh, Dad?"

He said it in such a casual tone that Biff was sure Sir Charles had only half-heard what his son had said. He looked up with a blank stare and said, "Eh? What? Oh, yes. Quite," and returned to his discussion with Tom

Brewster.

Peter winked at Biff and said, "Well, then I suppose we'd best be going, Biff?"

"Wait a second," Biff protested, looking at his plate, still half full of breakfast.

Sir Charles looked up and said quite calmly: "What was this about going by way of Grandmother's, Peter?"

Peter sank slowly back into his chair, and Sir Charles winked at Biff.

"I just thought it was a shame for Grandmother not to see what she might have had—especially after all the cheap little books I've bought her in the past. We could cycle over there and then take a bus or train from her house to London."

"But touring about with so valuable a book in hand," Sir Charles said. "Do you think it wise, son?"

"Well, we've come this far, and nothing's happened to the book," Peter protested. "Well guard it with our lives," he added dramatically.

Sir Charles smiled in Tom Brewster's direction. "What do you think, Tom?" he asked.

"Oh, I see nothing wrong with it." Biff's dad smiled. "Although I imagine Mr. Stringbourne might have some reservations about the boys wandering around Devonshire with that precious book."

"Well, perhaps we shouldn't mention it then," said Peter, nodding toward the spare form of Stringbourne himself, who was at that very moment threading his way across the dining room to their table.

“Since he was so helpful, do you think it quite fair to him, son?” Sir Charles asked.

“Please, Dad,” pleaded Peter, with a note of urgency in his voice that caused Biff to look at him sharply. Peter’s return glance told him nothing. So when Stringbourne arrived at their table they exchanged only small talk, and when they finished breakfast they had said nothing to the slight scientist about their planned detour and with good-bys all around, took their departure.

“Look,” said Biff, as they headed toward their bicycles. “Would you mind telling ole Sherlock why you’re keeping secrets from Stringbourne?”

Peter put his finger to his lips and looked around dramatically as he hurried down the stairs and out the door. Biff shook his head and followed silently in his wake. They proceeded without a word out the Edensboro gate and headed across the plain. They had pedaled along for fully five minutes and were starting up the long winding road away from the lab when Biff could stand it no longer. He pulled abreast of Peter and forced him to a stop.

“Okay, Dr. Watson,” he growled. “What’s all this Stringbourne business about? Where are we in this whodunit now?”

“I’d say we are just before uncovering a case of espionage,” said Peter calmly.

“Espio—” Biff began. He stared at Peter. “Spies, you mean?”

“Spies, I definitely mean,” said Peter.

“Namely, who?”

“A fellow in a beard, a fellow in a trench coat and a chap named Stringbourne,” said Peter.

“That’s a serious accusation,” said Biff. “Especially with regard to that last name. You know that.”

“Of course. That’s why I didn’t mention it to Dad,” said Peter, “but if Stringbourne’s mistake about the watermark is confirmed by my grandmother I think Dad should be told.”

“I see. The bearded fellow acts funny about his book, as does Stringbourne, so that connects them?” said Biff.

“In my whodunit it does,” said Peter.

Biff threw his hands in the air, “Well, you’re carrying the ball. Plunge on, Dr. Watson. Let’s see where it carries us.”

They remounted their bikes and again headed up the winding road. Soon they had passed the crest of the hill, and the laboratory vanished behind them. An hour later they reached Exeter and stopped for a breather. While they were there they decided to visit a couple of old castles and from there wandered into some ancient burial grounds. When they returned to their bicycles they noticed that the sky had begun to cloud over. Peter observed that it was “dampening on” again and predicted that this time the rainfall would be a heavy one. When the first large drops began to spatter on them Peter suggested they stop for lunch at

a wayside inn until the storm abated.

Their seats at the inn were right near the window, and though they ate very leisurely they could readily perceive that they were not going to be able to wait out this particular storm.

"It's going to be with us for some time," said Peter, glancing at a clock on the wall. "And we've lost so much time now, we may not make Grandmother's before dark as it is."

So they paid their bill, donned their raincoats, and slugged out into the rain. It was slow going in the storm because of the slick and narrow roads and the danger from passing cars which might not see them on account of the downpour.

After they had pedaled along for about an hour Peter said: "I'm soaked to the skin and freezing."

"We ought to stop somewhere and dry out," said Biff.

Peter looked up at the sky, which showed no signs of drying up.

"It's a good bit before dark," he said, "but I'm for stopping in the next town—Spreyton. If the rain stops we can just pay the day rate for the room and push on to Grandmother's. If it keeps up we can stay for the night."

"Lead on, Dr. Watson," said Biff, blowing some rain off his nose. "I'm with you."

They continued on their way and within a few minutes had reached a sign announcing the outskirts

of Spreyton. A short distance farther on they saw another sign pointing the way to the Boar's Head Inn. They turned into the inn driveway and as they did so, a car turned in behind them.

"Let's hurry before these folks in the car beat us to it," called Peter. "On a night like this rooms may be at a premium."

They sprinted toward the door and jumping off, dashed through the door of the inn, spraying water behind them. True to Peter's prediction, they were just in time to get the very last room available at the Boar's Head Inn.

"Are you with those gentlemen in the motor car?" the clerk asked, peering out into the rain.

Biff glanced out at the car, which had pulled up at the entrance. A couple of dim figures could be seen inside. "No, sir." He smiled. "We're cycling."

"Good gracious! On a night like this!" said the clerk, extending a pen for the boys to register.

They signed their names in the huge book, and Peter asked that some tea be sent to their room. A bellboy showed them to their quarters, and as he bowed out and closed the door, Biff said: "I'm going to soak in a hot bath for one solid hour." He began to peel off his wet clothes.

At that moment there came a knock on the door.

"Must be the tea I ordered," said Peter. "Come in!"

The door opened slowly, and into the room stepped a rain-spattered figure. He swept off his hat and they

could see a few drops glistening on his glasses and dropping on his beard.

“Good evening, lads,” the man said. “I have come for my book.”

CHAPTER XI

The Pay-Off

FOR a moment, the boys were stunned. They had been expecting this moment, but now that it had arrived, they were speechless.

“Oh come, boys,” said the bearded man. “You remember me—from Frierson’s bookshop. You have become aware, of course, that I made a terrible mistake.”

“Oh, the book! You—” said Peter, first to find his voice.

“Yes, I was terribly worried when I discovered that I had misfiled a valuable book and sold it to you by mistake,” said the bearded man.

“But how did you find us?” Biff asked.

“It wasn’t easy,” said the man. “Fortunately, I observed that you wore Harley ties and remembered you saying something about the book being a gift for your grandmother in Devon. I made inquiries about you at the school, and after describing you, I was told you

were on a bicycle trip to your grandmother's, in Hatherleigh, I believe."

"And you trailed us here?" Biff asked incredulously.

"After making a thousand inquiries along the way, yes," said the bearded man with a smile. "Not a bad bit of detective work, if I do say so myself."

At the word "detective" Peter said, "We thought you'd probably picked up a lead from Inspector Duggin."

Biff saw the man's eyes blink behind his thick glasses, but his face remained impassive.

"Inspector Duggin—of the Yard?" he asked. "You know him?" asked Biff.

"Heard of him," said the man. "What about him?"

"We contacted him when we found out about the book," said Peter.

"I see. And what did he do?"

"Took us to the bookshop, but it was closed. The man next door said it has been closed for a year," said Peter, watching the bookseller closely.

"Poor fellow. Should keep up with his competition," the bearded man said. "Come now, here is your money back. Don't keep me in suspense—the book, please."

Peter looked at Biff. Biff shrugged. There seemed little else to do but hand over the book. Peter reached slowly into his saddlebag, extracted the slim volume, and handed it to the bearded man.

"Ah, good," said the man. "You have no idea what a relief it is to see this."

"I wish Inspector Duggin were here to see that you're not a figment of our imagination," said Biff.

"I dare say," said the bearded man. "But I must get back to London, so I'll bid you good night and assure you I appreciate your honesty in this matter."

He turned and opened the door to leave. But suddenly he stopped and slammed it shut. A strange, stricken look crept over his face. He whipped off his thick-rimmed glasses and shoved them into his breast pocket, then turned back to snap the lock on the door. As he did, Biff's heart jumped. For in snatching off his glasses the man had caught one of the ear pieces in his beard, and Biff was astonished to see that a corner of the beard had come loose. It was, in fact, dangling free—pulled away from his face!

Biff was staring so hard at the loose beard that as the fellow turned he sensed something was wrong with his appearance and clapped his hand to his jaw. With a curse, he ripped the beard off his face and jammed it in his pocket.

Biff and Peter stared in amazement.

Without the glasses and the beard this was none other than the man in the dressing gown Biff had seen in the hall at Basingstoke—the man who had frightened away their midnight caller!

In a flash the man had a gun in his hand. He pointed it at them and said: "You will do exactly as I say, please."

Peter looked straight down the muzzle of the snub-



A strange, stricken look crept over his face

nosed gun and gulped. Biff felt his mouth go dry.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door which the man had just locked.

"Brewster! Balsam!" came a familiar voice. "Are you there?" No mistaking the voice. It was Inspector Ranald Duggin.

"Tell him to wait a moment," hissed the man, thrusting the pistol at Peter.

"Just a minute," Peter answered in a quavering voice.

The man pointed at the window with the gun barrel and motioned the boys toward it.

"Are you all right, boys?" Inspector Duggin called from beyond the door.

The man looked at Biff and nodded his head, as if prompting Biff to answer in the affirmative.

"Yes, sir," Biff answered.

They reached the window, and the bearded man jerked it open. The window led onto a fire escape. He jammed the gun into Biff's ribs, motioning him to go out through the opening.

Biff squirmed through the window, and right behind him came Peter, urged on by the gun.

There was an urgent banging on the door now, and Inspector Duggin called, "Open up in there!"

The man slammed the window shut and ordered the boys down the fire escape. They had to drop the last few feet, and as they did, the man landed beside them and motioned them up the alley in the rain.

When they reached the corner, he looked both ways, then herded them toward a car parked near the entrance.

It was the car which had followed them into the driveway earlier when they arrived.

As they drew near, the door was opened from the inside. The man shoved the boys into the back seat, crawled in beside them, and grunted, "Take off," to the driver.

With a screech of tires on the wet pavement, the car leaped away from the inn. Biff caught a glimpse of a man running out the door of the inn, a man who looked like Inspector Duggin. In a moment, he disappeared from view as the car went speeding through the misty rain.

The man watched out the back window for a minute or two, then turned toward Biff and Peter.

"Kindly kneel with your heads on the seat," he ordered.

They looked at him dumbly.

"Now!" he snapped.

Biff slid to a kneeling position on the floor and rested his head on the seat he had been occupying. Peter joined him a moment later.

"Thank you, boys," said the man. Biff saw him lean toward the driver and say, "The *Danzig*."

They felt the car increase speed slightly, and the man leaned back and relaxed. For a long while, they traveled a tortuously twisting path—for so long a time

that the boys felt their knees getting cramped. But when they started to squirm to get more comfortable, the bearded man ordered them to be still.

Biff considered all sorts of rash actions to get out of this jam they were in, but quarreling with the snub-nosed gun in the man's hand seemed a foolhardy idea indeed.

As they rode, Biff tried to make sense out of the new facts now at hand. Most incredible, of course, was the discovery that the "bearded" man and the man in the dressing gown at Basingstoke Inn were one and the same. He had removed his beard that night to keep the boys from recognizing him, should they see him. Biff decided. It meant that he had not wanted to retrieve his book at that particular time, Biff concluded. He was afraid that if they saw and recognized him, he would have no good reason for refusing the book. That seemed clear. But why? And what had the man in the trench coat intended to tell them that night when he was surprised by this man in the dressing gown? Why did he later follow him in the bus station at Dorchester?

The questions were whirling around in Biff's head and he had an idea they were doing the same in Peter's.

The car slowed down and began to wind through dimly lit streets. They could tell by the dancing shadows through the car windows. When Biff tried to peek and see where they might be, for future reference, he

felt the gun barrel shoved against the back of his head, and he put his forehead back on the seat.

They had been riding about an hour when the car squeaked to a stop. Biff started to raise his head, and their captor growled, "Down!"

A moment later, they felt blindfolds being pulled tightly around their eyes—first Biff's, then Peter's. Seconds later, they were led from the car. They could feel their feet sloshing through wet ground, and then on boards that gave slightly under their weight. They walked about fifteen steps, then Biff felt a hand steadying him, and a voice saying, "Step down."

He stepped down and felt a heavy, rocking motion beneath his feet. They were on a boat. There was a short walk along a deck, the sound of a door being opened, and then they were pushed through the door and ordered to sit down. When they did, the blindfolds were jerked loose.

Standing there, looking down at them, was their captor. Standing next to him was a man whose bulky coat and snap-brim hat struck a chord of remembrance in both Biff and Peter.

It was their shadow—the one who had pursued them from the gates of Harley and had led them a merry chase in the front and out the back of the bookstore that day. And a glance at his weasel face told Biff that this was not the same man who had made the midnight call to their room at Basingstoke.

The two men exchanged mumbled words and the

trench-coated fellow left, slamming the door of the stateroom behind him.

The owl-eyed man blinked and donned his glasses. They made his eyes seem twice as large as before, and he motioned them to be seated on the filthy-looking bunk.

"Your Inspector Duggin was guilty of slight mistiming back there in Spreyton," he said.

"No speak English," Biff murmured.

The owl-eyed fellow ignored the attempted levity and went on. "When did Scotland Yard start using callow schoolboys as decoys?" he asked.

"Good help is hard to find," said Peter, getting in on the act.

Their captor flushed. He sneered as he said: "You should make decoying a career, boys. You did a second-class job for Duggin, to be sure, but you did a first-class job for me." He took *Letters From Junius* out of his pocket and waved it under their noses as if to emphasize his point.

"Glad to be of service," said Biff.

"Make yourselves comfortable," said their captor, striding to the door. He bowed. "*Speciva*," he murmured and slammed the door behind him.

"*Speciva*. Isn't that Russian?" asked Peter.

"Means thank you, I believe," said Biff.

"What about that decoy business?"

"He thought we were being used as decoys by Inspector Duggin so as to trap him," said Biff.

"And he said he'd used us as decoys, too," said Peter.

"To carry his book in and out of Edensboro for him, no doubt," said Biff.

"With a message in it both ways, I'll wager," said Peter.

"So you were right about Stringbourne then," said Biff. "He read the message we brought in, then put one in there for us to carry out."

"That's why he lied to us about the book being valuable," said Peter. "So we'd be sure to get out on the road with it where old Brush Face could take it back from us."

"That seems like communicating the hard way, if you ask me," said Biff.

"It does indeed," said Peter. "In fact, why would they conceive of such a fantastic way to communicate with each other?"

"Suppose their other means of communication had broken down," Biff suggested.

"That's it!" said Peter, with a snap of the fingers. "We've got it."

"Okay, Dr. Watson—now if we're so smart, let's see if we can figure out a way to get out of this sardine can." He ran his hands along the wall, crawled up on the bunk and looked out a porthole, then through a high window into the companionway outside their door. He drew back swiftly with his finger to his lips. "Trench coat—standing out there with a bang-bang in

his hand,” said Biff.

Suddenly the deck shuddered beneath them as an engine coughed to life somewhere on the craft.

“It seems,” said Biff, slumping onto the blink, “that we are going bye-bye, and I wish we didn’t have a ticket for this particular trip.”

CHAPTER XII

Quick Fist

THE boat lurched in the choppy sea, and from its action, the boys judged that it was not a large craft. That was all they could judge, since they were imprisoned in an inside cabin, unable to tell anything about speed, direction, or anything else that might give them a clue to what this journey held in store for them.

When they had been under way for about fifteen minutes, Biff said, "I don't want to get on to a depressing subject, but I doubt that our friend, old Brush Face, has anything pleasant in store for us."

Peter rubbed his stomach. "It may not be any worse than what has started in here," he said weakly. "I'm slightly seasick. At least, I dunk it's the sea."

Biff rose and started to pace the little cabin. He examined each one of the portholes, tried the door, and examined the closet—to see if there was any way to escape from this trap they were in.

But they were sealed in as snugly as two sardines.

“If we’re going to try anything, we’d better hurry—I’m not feeling so good myself,” said Biff hollowly.

Peter nodded and rubbed his stomach again.

Biff started to pace the pitching floor again, and as he did, a noise he had heard earlier began to pierce the creaking-boat sounds that filled the cabin. The sound hadn’t meant much at first, but now it began to pick away at his subconscious. He cocked an ear to try and identify the noise. It was an intermittent clicking noise. As Biff turned his head to try and hear it better, he noticed that it seemed to be louder when he faced the port side of the vessel. He moved to the left, and the sound became more audible. Then he realized that the noise appeared to be coming from the heating and ventilating duct.

For a moment, Biff stood with his ear cocked toward the duct. Then he reached excitedly for a chair, and climbing up on it, pressed his ear to the open” duct.

“What’s up? What do you hear?” Peter asked.

“A bug. I’m sure of it,” said Biff.

“A what?” asked Peter.

“A code key. Someone’s sending radio code,” Biff» said excitedly. “Have you got a pencil?”

Peter searched his pockets and came up with a small stub.

Biff grabbed the pencil and pressed his ear to the duct again. He strained to decipher the dots and dashes being tapped out somewhere on the ship.

"You mean, you can read code?" Peter asked, leaning against the gray bulkhead and looking up at Biff.

"I'm a radio ham," Biff said. "But no ham I know ever sent like this guy. He's got a quick fist, this boy."

"Quick fist? What's that?"

"Ham talk," said Biff. "Means he's a fast sender. Shhhhhh. . . ."

Slowly, Biff began to transcribe the dots and dashes into letters, and as he did, he wrote them on the bulkhead.

L R S F M J U S

The code stopped momentarily, and the boys stared at the letters Biff had written on the wall. It was Peter, standing farther away from the writing, who suddenly deciphered them.

"*Letters From Junius!*" he blurted. "It's in a kind of shorthand."

"You're right," said Biff. "It means they're sending *Letters From Junius* by wireless to someone. To whomever they feed their espionage information. By radio, probably means out of the country."

"Then the book does contain some sort of cipher message," added Peter.

Biff nodded, holding up his hand for quiet as the sound of the code key began to drift out of the duct again.

Biff tried to keep up with the swiftly sent code, but encroaching sounds from the boat itself made the job difficult. He would catch a few letters, then miss some,

so what he was able to copy made little sense when written on the bulkhead.

"This fellow has the fastest fist I've ever heard," said Biff admiringly. "He's got a peculiar little flourish he uses, too—very distinctive."

For about ten minutes, the code rattled on. The letters Biff had deciphered might as well have been in Greek, for the boys could make no sense from them.

Then the sending stopped.

Biff climbed down from the chair and slumped onto the bunk beside Peter.

"Well, any minute now, we ought to know their plans for us," he said.

But the minutes ran on into an hour, and still the vessel plowed on. Gradually, the going seemed to get less rocky, and the boat appeared to be slowing. Then the engine stopped—and all aboard grew quiet.

The boys looked at each other fearfully—expectantly. What now? was the question in both their minds.

But the minutes ticked away and nothing happened. No returning footsteps; no sound of life on the quiet vessel.

Biff crawled once more to the porthole above the bunks. He looked—then looked again. He motioned to Peter to join him.

"Our guard has vamoosed," Biff whispered incredulously.

Peter took a quick look.

“What do you think?” he whispered.

“I don’t know,” said Biff, dropping down onto the bunk. “But if we’re going to try to get out of this, now’s the time.”

They slid off the bunk and stealthily crept to the door. Slowly, Biff turned the knob, waiting for the feeling of tension that came from a locked door.

But the knob turned smoothly, and to their amazement, the door opened easily!

The two boys looked at each other in disbelief. It seemed too good to be true—yet, there it was, a pathway to freedom.

Furtively, they stepped out into the companionway looking in each direction. At one end of the narrow passageway was a gangway leading topside. There were three doors opening off the companionway. Light was streaming from one of them, and they would have to pass it to get up on deck.

Together, the boys began to creep toward the source of the light. Halfway there, they came to a fire extinguisher hanging on the bulkhead. Biff reached up and quietly removed it from its mooring and, holding it like a club, continued to lead the way toward the light streaming into the companionway ahead.

They hardly dared breathe as they drew closer. But then, above the creaking boat, they heard a noise that sounded unmistakably like a groan. Biff looked at Peter and nodded toward the source of the noise. Peter shrugged his shoulders questioningly.

Now, the noises were louder—the sound of a man in pain!

Inch by inch they crept up to the door, and as they did, Biff peeked inside.

This was the radio room. Biff could see a table with a transmitter, receiver, and code key. But of more immediate interest was the sight he saw on a bunk in the corner.

Lying on the bunk, his face to the wall, lay a man, groaning loudly.

“Well! If it isn’t old Brush Face!” whispered Biff. “He’s seasick!”

Peter motioned for them to scoot on by, while the bearded man was still facing the wall. However, at that moment, Biff’s attention was drawn to something resting on the table with the radio equipment.

The book.

Just as Biff saw the book and pointed to it, Peter pointed to something else—a chair pulled back from the desk. Slung over the chairback was a shoulder holster. Their hearts pounded as they saw what was in the holster.

A gun.

The boys stared into each other’s eyes. Each knew what the other was thinking. If they had that gun, they might not have to worry about what awaited them up on deck, and they might somehow get off this boat.

Biff felt his pulse throbbing heavily in his temples as he pointed to himself, then to the gun.



Biff began to crawl on hands and knees

Peter nodded, and motioned for Biff to hand him the extinguisher. Biff turned it over, took a deep breath, and began to crawl on hands and knees through the door and into the radio room.

The groaning figure on the bunk still lay with his face to the wall. It was only about ten feet to the chair and the gun. After that, it didn't matter whether he became aware of their presence or not.

Slowly, Biff drew closer to the chair and the holster; only five more feet—only three now—

But suddenly—without warning—a form appeared in the doorway!

For a split second, all three—Biff, Peter, and the form in the trench coat, were frozen in surprise. But with a yell of “Hey!” the man came out of it and leaped toward Biff.

Off the bunk came the bearded man, his eyes wide with surprise.

Biff dived toward the chair with the holster. His hands grabbed the gun as he rolled out from under the man flying from the door.

Biff was sprawled flat on his stomach, but he had the gun in his hand.

The man was scrambling to his feet and, with a curse, turned to head for Biff.

It was then—looking down at the gun—that Biff noticed a shocking thing.

The chambers were empty! The pistol was not loaded!

CHAPTER XIII

Untrap

IN that awful instant as the man started to rise off the floor, Peter came to life. The English boy raised the fire extinguisher, aimed it toward the man and pulled the trigger. A stream of foam shot across the room but fell short and splashed at the man's feet. As Peter drew back to heave the extinguisher desperately at the trench coat the man's scrambling feet slid in the wet foam and flew out from under him. He hit the deck with a crash and started to flounder about like a fish out of water!

As the man thrashed about on the floor Biff grabbed the gun and backed off, waving it first at the floundering figure, then at the owl-eyed man still standing in shock at the bunk.

"Over there with rum at the bunk!" he commanded the fellow in the trench coat, and he backed away some more. He meant to get far enough away so that the men could not see that the weapon in his hand

was as harmless as a cap pistol.

The trench-coated figure scrambled to the bunk on his hands and knees.

"Now!" snapped Biff, recalling a similar order in the car not so long ago. "Kneel with your heads on the bunk."

The two men slowly complied, and Biff's heart slowed its pounding. With their backs to him, they could not see the pistol's empty chambers. If only one of them did not know, or remember, that the gun was unloaded.

"What if there's someone else aboard?" Peter gasped.

"There is. The radio operator," said Biff.

"What'll we do about him?"

"I'll call him down here," Biff said, moving toward the microphone of the boat's intercom.

"You don't know his name," said Peter.

"Yes, I do," said Biff with a grin. He leaned toward the mike, pressed the button, and said, "Sparks—Sparks—down below, at once!"

"Sparks?" asked Peter.

"All ship radio operators are called Sparks," said Biff. "Now, let's get back against the wall so he'll come in here before he sees us."

They shrank back against the bulkhead and waited. Soon they heard the scamper of feet outside, and in a moment, a blond young man with prominent teeth appeared in the doorway.

"Thanks, Sparks," Biff said, stepping forward and pointing the gun at the radio operator. "Over with them." He pointed the gun in the direction of the two men kneeling by the bunk.

The wide-eyed radio operator started to walk gingerly past Biff and toward the kneeling men.

"Wait," Biff commanded, jamming the gun in the operator's back. "Who else is aboard?"

"No one," the operator said.

Biff shoved him toward the other men and watched him kneel beside them.

"Now what?" Peter whispered.

"Now, to get off this thing," Biff answered. "But we've got to fix these guys first."

"No—you wouldn't shoot them!" Peter croaked.

Biff's heart began to pound hard again. "I ought to," he rasped, trying to sound as bloodthirsty as possible. At the same time, he pointed wordlessly at the gun in his hand.

Peter looked down at the pistol and the blood drained from his face. He gulped, and then, with a slight crack in his voice, he said, "Biff, no—no—don't do it. Well just lock 'em in!"

"Well-I," said Biff hesitantly, as if weighing this alternative against that of cold-blooded assassination. "Let's be quick about it."

"Tell you what," said Peter. "Let's get some of this furniture into the passageway."

"Good idea," said Biff, frankly wondering what on

earth Peter had in mind.

They dragged out a couple of chairs and a table.

“That’s enough,” said Peter.

“Oh no, it’s not,” said Biff, reaching for an object on the radio operator’s table. “Let’s not forget this.” In his hand, he held the source of all their trouble—*Letters From Junius*. It was now wrapped in a transparent plastic envelope, tightly sealed.

“All right. Now let’s get out of here,” said Peter.

They backed out the door, locked it, and immediately began jamming the chairs and table against it.

Then they clattered up the narrow gangway and out on deck. For the first time, they could see the kind of vessel they were on. It was about sixty feet in length and powered by an engine near the stern. The engine compartment had been removed, as though someone had been working on it. Apparently this was why the boat had stopped.

“Look!” Peter shouted, pointing toward the starboard side.

There, hanging from davits, was a neat little lifeboat, and in its stern was an outboard motor.

But this was not their greatest surprise, for when they looked out away from the craft, they saw lights on a shore that couldn’t have been more than a quarter of a mile away.

“Into the boat,” Biff yelled, “before those guys break out of there.”

Peter led the way to the lifeboat, and they climbed

in and lowered themselves into the water. Peter released the ropes from the pulleys, and they were adrift. Biff scrambled to the back of the boat, felt for the motor switch, and then, with a silent prayer, gave the starter rope a yank.

Nothing.

“Make sure it’s got gas!” Peter shouted, and hurried to join Biff at the back of the lifeboat.

Biff peered frantically at the levers on the motor. He turned one, and yanked the motor rope again.

Nothing.

“We’ll have to row!” Peter gasped. “Here are some oars.”

“You row. I’ll try to get this started.” Biff gasped.

He clawed at the controls of the little engine, trying to get it started. But, in the dark, he could not find the vital dials. Again and again, he turned nozzles and levers, and yanked the rope. And again and again, the motor refused to start. Peter was heaving hard against the oars, but was making little headway in the choppy waters. They were less than fifty yards away from the larger craft.

Suddenly, a spotlight aboard the vessel flashed on. It stabbed through the darkness, feeling for them—and then they were bathed in its glow!

“Duck!” Biff yelled, and Peter dived to the bottom of the lifeboat.

Biff ducked too, but as he did, he noticed an interesting development. The spotlight lighted up the little

engine in their boat and he could now see the controls perfectly. In an instant, he saw that the carburetor cut-off valve was closed. He snapped it open, gave the motor rope a yank, and with a roar, the motor came to life and the boat leaped forward.

They kept their heads down, expecting a shot to ring out momentarily from the vessel from which they had escaped. Then Biff had an idea. He raised his arm over the gunwale of the little boat and aimed the pistol slowly in the direction of the spotlight.

The spotlight instantly winked off.

"Now go!" yelled Biff, and gave the motor all it could handle. With a roar, they took off toward the dim lights on the shore. Biff began to weave the boat through the water to escape the spotlight in case it should flash on again.

And at that instant, it did. The light searched the waves for them, darting this way and that. Suddenly, they were in its focus again.

A shot rang out from the deck of the bigger boat, and they heard it whine away over their heads. They were getting farther and farther away from the vessel, and their bobbing journey through the waves made them an elusive target.

"Keep going, honey!" Biff yelled, patting the shiny motor.

The motor did keep going, and the next shot sounded very far away. Yard by yard, they inched away from the bright glare of the spotlight, and soon were

on the edge of its brightness.

One more shot whined over their heads, and in the next instant, they saw the light rise to feel for them. But a moment later, they were in darkness and beyond the reach of the bright spotlight

“Not bad for two callow youths with one empty gun, eh, Dr. Watson?” yelled Biff.

“Elementary, my dear Holmes,” shouted Peter.

They ducked their heads from the salt spray as the boat headed in toward the illumination on the shore. Dimly ahead, Biff could see the warning lights of a dock and aimed for it. When they drew near, he slowed the motor and they inched their way in toward safe haven.

Five minutes later, they bumped against a deserted wooden dock, and with a couple of quick bounds, were out of the boat. They tied up the lifeboat. Biff grabbed the plastic-covered *Letters Front Junius*, and they turned to hurry away from the dock.

At that moment, they heard an engine cough to life somewhere out in the darkness. It sounded like a big engine.

Peter glanced down at the name stenciled on the prow of the lifeboat they had just deserted. It read, *Danzig*.

“Bon voyage, *Danzig*!” Peter shouted in the direction of the roaring engine.

Biff grabbed his arm and shouted, “If you don’t mind, Dr. Watson—let’s get out of here!”

The two boys ran up the dock and along a darkened wharf. They could see bright lights behind the dark buildings and headed that way. To their joy, they saw a taxi parked in front of a fish and chips restaurant. They hurried to the restaurant and went racing through the door. A taxi driver, the lone customer in the place, sat dolefully munching a plate of fried fish and chips.

“Where are we?” Biff shouted, without thinking.

The taxi driver looked up in surprise and growled:

“Aren’t you a bit young for the hard stuff, m’lad?”

“He thinks you’re tight.” Peter chuckled. He looked at the taxi driver, and said, “You’ll have to excuse my friend. He’s just finished a long and exciting sea voyage and he’s been so sick, he hardly knows where he is.”

“This here’s Bude,” said the taxi driver, giving Biff a suspicious look. “You’re at Widemouth Bay.”

“Bude—Bude,” Peter repeated. “How far from Spreyton?”

“About thirty-five, forty miles,” the taxi driver said.

“Can you drive us there?” Biff asked.

“If you have the wherewithal, I can,” said the man.

“Is this wherewithal?” asked Peter, waving his slim stock of money in the air.

“The very stuff,” grinned the taxi driver. “I’m at your bloomin’ service, sir.”

They hurried from the restaurant, jumped into the taxi, and one hour later, were rolling up in front of the

inn at Spreyton which they had left only a few hours before.

“Nice to be back.” Biff grinned. “Pay the man, Pete.”

Peter paid the taxi driver, and the boys hustled out of the taxi and into the inn. They walked past the amazed room clerk, who kept trying to open his mouth to say something.

When they reached their room, they found out what it was. There sat Inspector Ranald Duggin of Scotland Yard, talking on the telephone.

CHAPTER XIV

Unraveled

“GOOD evening, Inspector,” said Biff casually.

The inspector jumped to his feet. “What—what happened to you two?” Open-mouthed, he pointed to the window through which they had exited so hastily just a few hours before. “Where on earth have you been?”

“It wasn’t earth,” said Peter. “It was sea.”

“At sea!” the inspector said. “And I’ve had every police cruiser in this part of England combing the empty warehouses and shady rooming places for you.”

“We’re awfully sorry,” said Biff. “We were being held on a boat called *Danzig*—”

“By that bearded chap from the bookshop,” Peter interjected slyly. “The one you thought was a figment of our imagination, remember?”

“Yes, I remember,” the inspector said dryly. “His name is Marius Gorling.”

“But how do you know?” Biff blurted.

"He's an old acquaintance," said the inspector. "But that story can wait. First tell me your story—that business of out the window and down the street, in the car and then—well, whatever else happened."

"It's a little fantastic," said Biff.

"After your story of the bookshop, I'm prepared for anything," said the inspector. "Carry on."

Peter looked at Biff. "Shall I tell it, or will you?" he asked, smiling.

"You do a more polished reading than I." Biff grinned. "Go ahead."

"Well," Peter began, with a note of enjoyment in his voice, "we had just checked in, when old Brush Face—I mean this Marius Gorling showed up and demanded his book back. So we gave it to him. But, when he opened the door to leave . . ." From that point on, Peter's voice trembled with the excitement of their forced exodus through the window; the wild auto ride; their incarceration below deck on the *Danzig*; and their escape through the unlocked cabin door.

Biff took over at that point to tell of the panic he had felt upon finding that the captured gun was not loaded. Then Peter continued with how they retrieved *Letters From Junius*, and of their flight in the lifeboat amidst the hail of bullets from the *Danzig*.

Peter paused breathlessly.

Inspector Duggin looked slowly from one to the other, puffed his pipe, and drawled, "All this with an unloaded gun, lads?"

"Yes, sir," said Peter, taking a deep breath. "Let's see, Biff. Did I forget anything?"

"You mean there could be more?" exclaimed the astonished detective.

"Oh!" said Biff. "We forgot to tell about hearing their wireless operator sending out *Letters From Junius* in code."

"How's that again?" demanded the detective, aghast.

"Yes," said Peter. "We figure they were spies who used the book to get secret information out of Edensboro."

The inspector leaned forward with a sharp look in his eyes. "Beg pardon?" he whispered. "Did you say—Edensboro?"

Biff and Peter looked at each other in surprise.

"Yes," said Biff. "Didn't you know our dads are scientists at the Edensboro Atomic Research Laboratory?"

"No, I did not know your dads are scientists at the Edensboro Atomic Research Laboratory," said the inspector, with a long-suffering note in his voice, "because, you didn't tell me your dads are scientists at the Edensboro Atomic Research Laboratory!" He jumped to his feet. "In fact, this is the first time in this whole fantastic story you have even mentioned Edensboro Atomic Research Laboratory."

"Sorry," mumbled Peter.

"Good grief!" the inspector snorted.

“But do you think we’re right—about Gorling using the book to smuggle information out of Edensboro?” Biff asked.

“How in heaven’s name should I know?” sighed the detective. “You haven’t even mentioned a word about the book ever being at Edensboro!”

“Oh, didn’t we?” said Biff sheepishly. “Well, tell him, Peter.”

So Peter told the detective about their overnight stop at the atomic laboratory; the validation of the book’s authenticity by Stringbourne; and the orders from their fathers to return the book at once. Peter gave a little less dramatic reading than he had done with the story of their kidnapping and escape.

When he had finished, Biff said, “Well, what do you say, sir? Doesn’t it sound as if Gorling used the book to get information in and out of Edensboro?”

“Very likely,” said Inspector Duggin, rising and starting to pace the floor. “Fantastic—but very, very likely.”

Biff and Peter smiled happily at each other, and then Biff said, “Sir, we’ve told you our story. Would you mind telling us how you happened to show up here just when you did?”

“Time for that in a moment,” said the inspector. “First I’ve got to call off the manhunt I have under way for you two lads. Then I want a description of the boat you were held captive on. Finally, we have to arrange to get back to Edensboro with you to alert them about

what's been going on."

The phone rang.

"That's probably my search party reporting now," said the detective, picking up the receiver. "Duggin here," he answered. He listened for a moment, then said, "Call off the bloodhounds, sergeant, the lost sheep have returned to the fold."

Biff and Peter grinned at each other and sank wearily on to the bed.

"I'm bushed," groaned Peter.

"I'm starved," sighed Biff.

"I'm not surprised," said Peter. "But for once, so am I."

Inspector Duggin put his hand over the phone and glanced at his wrist watch. "I say, it's getting on. It will be after midnight before I can get you back to Edensboro. I suggest you hurry downstairs and order supper for us all before they close for the night. There is a matter of jurisdiction involved here and I must call National Security for instructions on this."

The boys nodded wearily and as Biff opened the door to leave, the detective called: "Oh, perhaps you'd better leave that little book with me. I'd hate for that to go astray."

Peter handed *Letters From Junius* to the detective, who glanced at the tight, plastic wrapping with which Gorling had covered the book and murmured, "Wonder why he wrapped it in this?"

"Can't imagine," Peter answered.

The detective dropped the book on the bed, waved to the boys and returned to his phone conversation.

They reached the inn dining room just a few minutes before it was scheduled to close. The waitress explained that it would take slightly longer than usual to serve them, since things would have to be reheated but the boys assured her they understood and would not mind waiting. Peter asked her to prepare an order of roast beef for Inspector Duggin also, and they settled back to await their food.

"I imagine our dads will be slightly surprised to see us back so soon," said Biff.

"Especially after midnight with a Scotland Yard man in tow," added Peter. "I say, perhaps we'd better call them before they get to bed or we may have trouble getting into Edensboro."

"Might be a good idea," said Biff.

"I think we ought to," said Peter. "If Stringbourne were up wandering around and should see us all come in he'd know something was up."

"And if we came in unannounced, the ruckus might just attract his attention," said Biff.

"You're right," said Peter. "I'll go call Dad now." He rose and hurried toward the phone booth in the hall.

A few minutes later he returned, frowning.

"Did you get them?" Biff asked.

"I got them all right," said Peter, "but Dad was a little confused by my message."

"What message is that?" said a clipped voice behind

them and Inspector Duggin slid into a seat at the table with them.

"I called Dad to warn him we were coming," said Peter.

"Oh dear," the detective murmured. "I wish you had waited."

Peter looked perturbed. "We thought they ought to know we were coming—so we wouldn't go barging in and attracting Stringbourne's attention."

"You didn't discuss any of the details of all this with your dad, did you?" asked the inspector.

"Oh, no," Peter insisted. "I simply told Dad Biff and I were returning and had a guest with us named Duggin." Peter imitated his father's gruff voice as he added, "'Duggin, Duggin . . . who's he?' said Dad."

The detective chuckled. "Well, that can't do any harm, I suppose—although National Security was pretty adamant about letting things lie just as they are until they could get a man on the scene up there. I'm to stand by with you boys until then."

"What did they think of our little whodunit?" smiled Peter.

"They thought I was pulling their leg at first." The inspector smiled.

"You said you'd tell us about your part of this whodunit, sir. How did you manage to show up right after Marius Gorling got to our room?"

"Well, lads," said the detective, reaching for his pipe and proceeding to fill it. "My part of the story isn't

quite as fantastic as yours, but it will do. You see, after you chaps left me at the Yard that day we had the little to-do about the book, I went back to the office to learn that I had a call from the little man who had given us the information about Mr. Frierson—the fellow who owned the shop next door, remember? It appears that shortly after we left, he saw a man enter Frierson's. He was in there a few minutes and then left. What attracted his attention was the fact that the man had a beard and thick glasses, just as you boys had claimed. Well, our little man had the presence of mind to copy down the license number of the car the bearded man was driving. He gave this to me when I returned to Frierson's. I decided it might be a good idea to have a look inside that place so I popped the lock and searched the place. And what do you suppose I found in a back closet?"

The boys shook their heads.

"A postman's uniform," said the inspector.

"Ah ha!" said Peter.

"Quite so," said the inspector. "I, of course, thought immediately of the stolen postbox at Harley. So I began looking further. I could see immediately that someone had been over the rear of this place with a dust cloth. Since the rest of the place was untouched I decided the bearded fellow had come back to wipe out any fingerprints he might have left behind. That meant he was afraid his prints could be traced. So I called headquarters and had them send a man down

to dust the place for prints.

"I had Motor Vehicles start running down the license number of the car for me," the inspector continued. "And a few minutes later I had the address they furnished me. I took a little ride out to the place and sure enough, there sat the very car. It wasn't more than half an hour when who should walk out and climb into the car but one bearded chap with thick glasses. He didn't look like anyone I knew, but as I was following him away from there, headquarters called me on my car radio and said they had identified fingerprints at Frierson's as belonging to one Marius Gorling, a counterfeiter and confidence man and an old friend of Scotland Yard. I took another look at the fellow in the car ahead. Of course. This was Marius Gorling, his familiar old face covered with a beard. He was apparently wearing the thing about London so we at the Yard wouldn't spot him and make life miserable for him. He knew we had lots of questions we wanted to ask him and had been searching for him."

"What did you do then?" Peter asked.

"Well, I followed Mr. Marius Gorling to an expensive East End apartment district. He parked the car and left. As I settled down for another wait I began to think about you two boys and that book he had sold you. That really seemed peculiar now, and I wondered if it might be possible to locate you to get a look at that book. I recalled your names and something about your being on a bike holiday to Devon. Of course that

wasn't much to go on until I recalled the color of your ties."

"We didn't think you had noticed," said Biff.

"I didn't, consciously." The inspector smiled. "Thinking back, I recalled that they were Harley colors, however. And that really thickened the plot. Here I had two Harley boys sold a peculiar book by a counterfeiter out of a shop which doesn't belong to him and which contains a postman's uniform that might very well be connected with the case of the stolen postbox on the grounds of Harley."

"It all connected in a way," said Peter.

"In a way I couldn't figure out," said the inspector. "I knew I needed time to work on it, so I had a stake-out man sent to relieve me—one who knew Gorling. I told him about the beard. Then I returned to my office and called Harley, trying to track you chaps down. Since it was term's end, there was no one there who could help me. I took care of some other business and returned to relieve my stake-out man. He went home and got some rest and then came back and took over for me at midnight. Next morning the stake-out man called me at headquarters to say that Gorling had just returned to his car and that my man was following him. Gorling wandered about London on various little errands and then headed south out of the city with my man right behind him. He followed Gorling to Basingstoke, saw him pull up in front of the inn, then go in and ask the clerk something and return to his car.

He parked a short way off as though waiting for someone. My man was curious, so he went in, showed his badge and asked the clerk what Gorling had inquired about. That's when he discovered Gorling had asked about you two boys."

"He was probably following the itinerary we had laid out to make sure his plan was working," said Biff.

"But I wonder why he took a chance on our seeing him with the beard on?" Peter suggested.

"He'd probably been wearing the beard so long around London he simply forgot it for the moment," said the inspector. "These hoodlums always make some simple mistake. Well, a few minutes later, you chaps pedaled up on your bikes and signed in. My man saw you, and then he saw Gorling climb out of his car and enter shortly after. Only by this time he had removed the fake beard."

"Good thing your man was familiar with what he really looked like," said Biff.

"Oh, he is very familiar with Mr. Gorling from past experience," the inspector drawled. "When he saw that Gorling had removed the beard, however, he thought the fellow had removed it because he was now outside London, away from Scotland Yard, and didn't need a disguise any longer. He didn't connect the removal with you boys at all. Not until he called me, that is."

"When was that?" Peter inquired.

"A few minutes after Gorling checked into the hotel behind you lads," said the detective. "When he told me

about Gorling asking about you two and then described you, I knew my two bookstore boys had been found for me.”

“Oh,” exclaimed Biff, “then it was *your* man who came to our door that night to warn us about Gorling being on our trail!”

“Precisely,” said the inspector. “Only as luck would have it, Gorling came out from the bath into the hall, just as my man knocked on your door.”

“Which was why your man in the trench coat put on the sudden drunk act,” said Biff.

“Correct,” said the inspector. “And he did not dare try to contact you again that night, lest Gorling see him and be scared off from whatever he was planning. We’ve been trying to get something on this scoundrel for years, and this seemed a good chance.”

“Then we changed our itinerary and almost fouled up everything,” said Peter.

“Quite so,” said Inspector Duggin. “From Gorling’s actions, it was quite evident he had knowledge of your itinerary. And, of course, we didn’t.”

“We think he got our itinerary out of the mailbox,” said Biff.

“Probably so,” said the inspector. “At any rate, he didn’t seem worried about following you. The next morning he drove on and waited in a few towns, with my man right behind him. When he got to Dorchester the following day, he went over to the bus station. He said Gorling seemed to be checking on buses there.”

"We saw him there," said Peter. "And we saw your man trailing him."

"Ah, that explains why he went right on from there to Exeter and checked in at a hotel. He must have seen you on the bus. Unfortunately, my man didn't see you at all."

"Then how did you get back on our trail?" asked Peter.

"When my man reported losing track of you I simply tried to guess what route you might take to get to Devon and went looking for you myself."

"Stopping at a farmhouse near Romney to make a phone call?" said Biff.

"Oh, found out about that, did you?"

"We were sleeping in the barn on that very farm." Biff smiled.

The detective rolled his eyes heavenward. "So near and yet so far," he sighed. "Well, of course I didn't find you, so I decided to rejoin my man, who had followed Gorling to Exeter. We decided, by his relaxed manner, that he knew exactly where you were, so we stuck with him. Well, he led us to you all right, but we lost you all in the rain momentarily and didn't catch up with you until he'd entered your room upstairs. You know what happened after that."

"Oh, indeed we do," groaned Peter.

"And just think," said Biff, "if we hadn't wandered into Scotland Yard with the book that day, Gorling's whole scheme might have been carried off without a

single soul ever knowing that we'd been used as pawns in a spy plot."

"And Stringbourne would be carrying on business as usual, instead of being tossed in jail as he will be the moment we tell Dad about all of this." Peter said excitedly.

"Well, no," said Inspector Duggin. "That isn't exactly the way we have it planned."

CHAPTER XV

Hole in the Web

“BUT, sir,” Biff protested, “Stringbourne is the only one at Edensboro who had contact with the book. It has to be him.”

“Oh, he’s probably the inside man,” said the inspector. “But as of now, he is our only link with the outside man—Gorling.”

“That’s right,” said Biff. “Right now, Stringbourne has no way of knowing that we escaped and threw a monkey wrench into things.”

“Unless Gorling has some other way of communicating with him,” said Inspector Duggin, “and I don’t think we have to worry about that. If he had some easy way of contacting Stringbourne, he certainly wouldn’t have concocted such a fantastic scheme as this book business.”

“That’s what Peter figured,” said Biff. “There were so many ways for the book gimmick to go wrong.”

“Indicating to me how desperate Gorling was to

communicate with his contact at Edensboro,” said Inspector Duggin.

“Of course Gorling knew from reading our itinerary that we were going to Edensboro first, then to Grandmother’s. But if I hadn’t looked inside the book and noticed its apparent rarity, it might never have gotten into Stringbourne’s hands at all,” said Peter.

“Oh, Gorling knew the chances were you would look inside, if for nothing more than to write a little inscription there, since it was a gift. He knew your curiosity would be piqued and since you were going to Edensboro, you would be sure to mention the curious occurrence to your dad. The next logical step, naturally, would be to bring in Stringbourne for his expert advice.”

“Quite an ingenious plot,” said Peter.

“With us as decoys all the way,” added Biff.

“Perhaps Stringbourne can be turned into a decoy from here on out,” said Peter.

“That’s what National Security has in mind,” said the inspector. “Perhaps you can simply say that the bearded man caught up with you and retrieved his book. Period. You regard that as perfectly normal. It might lead Stringbourne to believe that the little exchange of messages between him and Gorling had been carried out successfully.”

“But if Gorling should reach him to warn him that we escaped—” Peter began.

“I don’t think there’s any danger of that,” said the

inspector. "If it were that easy for them to communicate they wouldn't have used this fantastic scheme."

"Or if Stringbourne should see you enter Edensboro with us," said Biff.

"That we'll have to risk," said the inspector. "National Security feels someone should be on the scene there immediately. I'm elected, whatever the risk."

"Well then, what next, sir?" asked Peter.

"Food. What else?" said the inspector, smiling down at the roast beef being placed before him by the waitress.

So the three of them proceeded to do justice to the double portions of the succulent English beef, and when they had finished the boys checked out of the inn, stuffed their bikes into the trunk of the inspector's big cruiser and a few minutes later were speeding toward the Royal Atomic Research Laboratory in Edensboro.

"Here, put this back in your saddlebag for now," said the inspector, handing *Letters From Junius* to Peter.

"And this too?" asked Biff, displaying the pistol he had taken off the *Danzig*.

"Oh, the empty gun," drawled Inspector Duggin. "Yes, that too. We may want to check it for ownership later on."

Peter stowed the articles in his bag, cradled it in his lap, and settled back for the long trip to Edensboro.

The great laboratory was dark when they arrived

two hours later except for a light in the office section of the converted castle.

"Our dads are waiting for us," said Peter, nodding toward the light.

They identified themselves at the gate and found that passes had been left for all three of them. A few seconds later, they hurried across the huge yard into the great hall and up the stairs to their fathers' offices.

As their footsteps echoed in the stone hall, Biff's father and then Sir Charles stepped out to greet them.

"Now what was all this mystery about on the telephone?" Sir Charles boomed at Peter.

Peter raised his finger to his lip and peered down the shadowy corridor. "Shhhh, Dad," he whispered.

Sir Charles looked suspiciously at his son, then at Inspector Duggin.

"I can explain, sir," said the inspector, holding out his hand and introducing himself to the two men. "And I think we had better step inside where we can talk in private," he added.

The two boys and the inspector followed their dads into Tom Brewster's office. The inspector noted that this office opened on to the corridor and that Sir Charles's office next door, did not.

"I think perhaps we had best use the inner office," said the inspector.

"We'll need more chairs then," said Sir Charles.

Biff and Peter set down their luggage, and they each carried an extra chair into the inner office. They

formed a semicircle about Sir Charles's desk.

Then slowly, step by step, Inspector Duggin related to Sir Charles and Tom Brewster all that had happened since he had first met the two boys at Scotland Yard. Biff and Peter took over to tell of their kidnapping; of their overhearing the coded transmission of *Letters From Junius*; and of their escape from the *Danzig*.

When they finished, the inspector said, "So it would seem, Sir Charles, that one way or another, this gang has been getting information about the atomic space engine out of Edensboro by way of your Mr. Stringbourne."

"My word! It does seem so," said Sir Charles, still aghast at the strange story.

"Do you intend to seize Stringbourne tonight?" asked Tom Brewster.

"No, I'd prefer not to," said Inspector Duggin.

"But, by George, isn't it dangerous to have him still running loose about the premises?" asked Sir Charles. "If we play cat-and-mouse with him, and he should do some irreparable harm . . ."

"But you see, sir," said Inspector Duggin, "he is our only link left to Gorling and the spy ring outside. If we cut off Stringbourne, we merely cut off an arm. It's the head of the ring we are after. Even without Stringbourne, they would still be free to operate in other areas, and that is precisely what National Security will want to stop."

"You see, Dad," said Peter, "Stringbourne hasn't any

way of knowing his little game has been discovered.”

“Oh, my goodness!” said Sir Charles suddenly, his face blanching. “I just thought—”

“Of what?” said Inspector Duggin.

“Stringbourne was in my office when Peter called saying he was coming back here with a Mr. Duggin. Do you suppose that could have alerted Stringbourne that something had gone wrong?”

“Not unless the name Duggin meant something to him,” said the inspector.

Peter gulped. “I did mention your name one time while we were telling him about the book business. If he remembered . . .”

“The book,” said Sir Charles. “We’d best put that in the safe so we will have it for evidence when needed, shouldn’t we?”

“Good idea,” said Inspector Duggin. “National Security will want to see it also, for purposes of decoding.” He turned to Peter. “You have *Letters From Junius*?”

Peter rose from his chair. “In my saddlebag in the outer office,” he said. “I’ll get it.”

He walked to the door, opened it, and took one step into Mr. Brewster’s office. Then he froze.

“The book!” he gasped. “It’s been stolen!”

Everyone crowded to the door. There, where he had dropped it on the floor, stood Peter’s saddlebag, gaping widely where it had been opened.

“Quick! Stringbourne’s office. Where is it?” snapped

Inspector Duggin.

“Follow me!” said Tom Brewster, leading the way into the corridor.

They raced after Biff’s father, down the long, dim corridor, around a corner and down a flight of three steps. There, ahead of them, a shaft of light pierced the gloom from beneath the door of another office.

Tom Brewster was the first to reach the door. He tamed the knob, found it locked, and crashed his shoulder against the wood. With a splintering crash, the door flew open.

An acrid smell assailed their nostrils, and there, sprawled head down at his desk, was the slim form of the scientist, Stringbourne. His face lay in the pages of *Letters From Junius*, and in his hand was a crumpled book page which had been almost completely consumed by flames.

The inspector was the first to reach the scientist and, as he leaned forward, he reeled back, coughing.

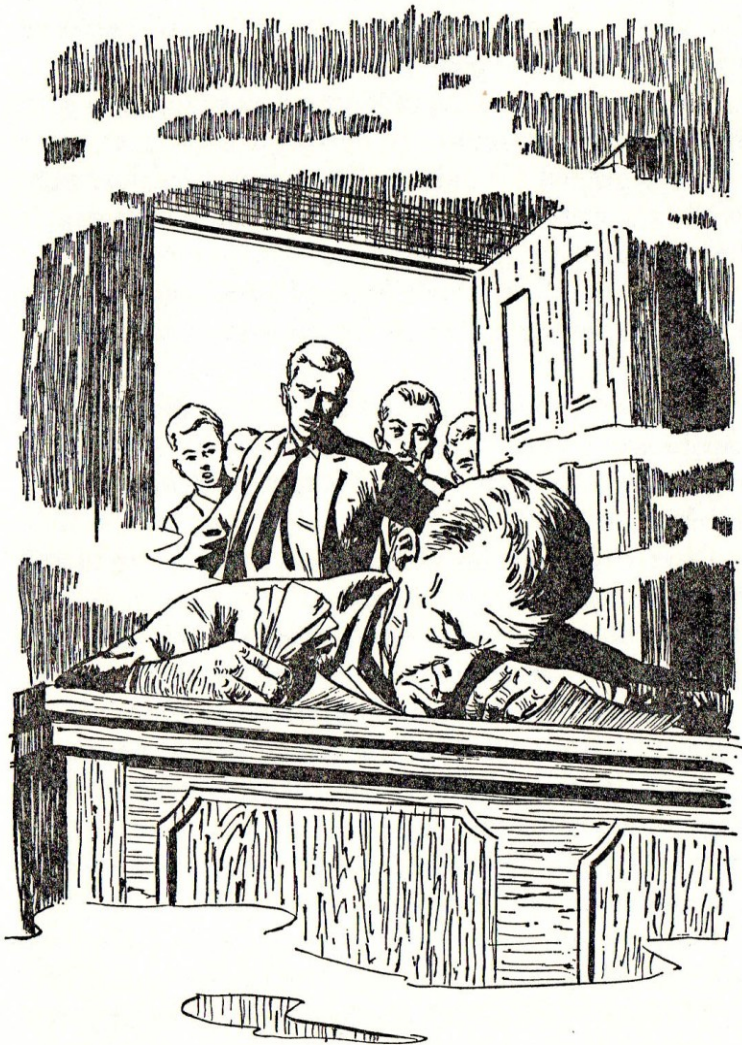
“Open the windows—quickly,” he gasped.

The boys flew to the windows, opened them wide, and in a few moments, the chill night air had dispelled the fumes in the office.

Inspector Duggin placed the unconscious scientist upright in his seat, pulled open one of his eyelids, and began slapping his face to revive him.

“Stringbourne!” he shouted. “Come to—wake up!”

The scientist’s head lolled on his shoulders, his eyes fluttered open for just a second or two, and he croaked



His face lay in the pages of "Letters from Junius"

a few words.

"Tried to break off," they heard him mumble. "Wouldn't let me."

And with that, Stringbourne's eyes closed and he passed out completely.

"Get a doctor here at once!" snapped the inspector.

Sir Charles reached for the phone, called plant security and instructed them to send a doctor at once. When he hung up the phone he said, "What happened to Stringbourne?"

"Poisoned—by something on this page he tried to burn," said Inspector Duggin. "It must have contained incriminating evidence he wanted destroyed. Gorling knew he'd try to do that very thing if he ever got his hands on it."

"But why would Gorling want to do this if they are part of the same gang?" asked Sir Charles.

"Remember what Stringbourne said before he passed out?" Peter said. "He tried to break off, and they wouldn't let him."

"Then that's why Gorling used this fantastic book scheme to contact Stringbourne," said the detective. "Because Stringbourne had stopped communicating with him in their regular way. When Stringbourne saw the book he probably used it to send a message to Gorling saying he wanted to break off."

"Knowing that Gorling was waiting outside for us to come out," said Biff.

"Or that we would take the book straight back to

him as we said we were going to," Peter added.

"So when Gorling got the book back and saw you were on his trail, Inspector, he decided Stringbourne should be silenced before he could be apprehended and give the whole show away."

"Precisely," said the inspector.

"But, sir," said Peter wonderingly, "how did Gorling plan to get the poisoned book back into Stringbourne's hands? Our escape might have fouled up his whole scheme."

"What escape?" asked the inspector, a twinkle in his eye.

Biff and Peter stared at each other, then back at the inspector.

"You mean you think he even staged that escape?" asked Biff.

"Think about it, boys," said the detective gently. "The door of your stateroom being so conveniently open. Gorling being so conveniently seasick. The gun and the book being so conveniently available. The gun being unloaded so that no one could get hurt if anything went wrong. Their missing you when they shot at you in the lifeboat."

"Well, there goes my warm, heroic feeling!" moaned Peter.

Two white-clad attendants arrived with a stretcher, and a few seconds later, they carried the still form of Stringbourne out of the office.

"And there goes our one chance to lay our hands on

Gorling,” said Inspector Duggin.

“Not necessarily,” said Biff.

All eyes in the office turned toward him.

“What do you mean, lad?” asked the inspector.

“There’s one more chance to find him,” said Biff.

“Through his radio operator with the quick fist.”

CHAPTER XVI

Aerial Dragnet

“WHAT is this quick fist, son?” asked Inspector Duggin.

“Gorling’s radio operator has a very fast, distinctive sending style,” said Biff. “An operator’s sending style is a lot like his fingerprints, and I think I could recognize it on the air. I’ve done it with some of my amateur radio friends.”

“But what good would that do, Biff?” asked Sir Charles.

“I think Biff means that with radio-direction-finding equipment, we could pinpoint wherever the man was sending from,” explained Tom Brewster.

“But you’re assuming they’ll be using the radio. Why?” asked Sir Charles.

“Because I believe Gorling reports all his activities to his superiors by radio. He’ll certainly be reporting to them on his effort to get rid of Stringbourne,” said Biff.

"In other words, you'd have to be tuned in at the exact time he was sending, and on the exact frequency he was using. Then the *Danzig* would have to sit right there until we could seize him. Right?" asked Inspector Duggin.

"The odds are long, I'll admit," said Biff.

"But if this operator sends on a regular schedule—say about the time we heard him sending from the *Danzig*—wouldn't that lessen the odds?" asked Peter. "We'd know what time to listen."

"Yes," said Biff. "And if he does report at night, there would be just a certain band of frequencies he could use for best long-distance coverage. So we'd know the best place to listen."

Inspector Duggin looked from Biff to Peter. "I admire your optimism," he said, "but it's a needle-in-a-haystack kind of tiling that might be hard to sell to National Security. However, I'll try it on them. We may have to use the idea."

The inspector lifted *Letters From Junius* gingerly off Stringbourne's desk and rewrapped it in its plastic jacket. "Security will want to check this for code," he said. "Now, I'd best get on the telephone and tell them what's happened here." He held up a cautioning finger to all in the room. "Meanwhile, mum's the word on what's happened to Stringbourne. The less Gorling knows, the more he may try to find out, and that may help us net him."

Next morning, Edensboro was overrun with Na-

tional Security officers. But search as they might, there was nothing in Stringbourne's office, or among his personal effects, which gave any indication of the extent to which his espionage activities had penetrated. Indeed, there was nothing to even connect him with Gorling or a spy ring. The little scientist hovered at the very edge of life, so he was in no condition to undergo a grilling. Gorling himself had apparently disappeared off the face of the earth. An extensive search of British territorial waters turned up one trace of the *Danzig*, but after following in pursuit, it had vanished.

Thus it was that National Security, reluctantly and with scant optimism, decided to turn to the aerial-search plan conceived by Biff.

Biff was supplied with a short-wave receiver which was installed in Stringbourne's office. From that point, he was connected by telephone to Coast Guard Headquarters, who were equipped with the radio-direction-finding equipment so vital to the plan. When Biff detected the quick-fisted operator's signal on the air, he had only to pick up the phone, contact Coast Guard, inform them of the sender's frequency and what he was sending, so they could get a "fix" on him, with their direction-finding antenna.

Biff never dreamed how quickly his plan would bear fruit.

He had been tuning the dial for only about an hour the very first night, when to his amazement, he heard

the style he knew he would recognize anywhere.

“Peter!” he gasped. “It’s him, Quick Fist!

“I say!” Peter shouted. “Good show!”

Biff leaned close to his receiver, but slowly the look of joy on his face turned to dismay. He stared at the receiver.

The message he heard was an S O S. Quick Fist was frantically reporting the *Danzig* on fire and sinking, somewhere off the English coast.

Biff knew the Coast Guard’s regular receiver would be tuned automatically to the distress frequency. He grabbed the phone on his desk to have them tune their direction-finding equipment to this unexpected frequency also. Then he turned back to his receiver and began to transcribe the frantic message. Over and over, the S O S came through, giving the *Danzig*’s position in the English Channel and pleading for aid.

Then, as if cut by a giant knife, the signal quit.

Biff sat stunned, the dead earphones pressed to his head, trying to visualize what sudden tragedy might have so abruptly halted this cry for aid.

He reached for the telephone to find out if Coast Guard had pinpointed the *Danzig*’s position, but he found everyone busy with the rescue procedure which always ensued upon receipt of such distress calls.

Biff hung up the phone and looked at Peter.

“Well, that could close the case right there,” he said, “if the Coast Guard doesn’t reach them in time.”

Two hours later, Biff was overcome with curiosity.

He could wait no longer to hear what had come of the Coast Guard's rescue operation, so he picked up the phone and called. To his surprise, a familiar voice answered.

"Hello, Biff Brewster," said the clipped tones. "This is Inspector Duggin. We got word of the *Danzig* thing at the Yard, and I came down here to check on it."

"What happened?" Biff asked.

"Bad news, I'm afraid," said the inspector. "The rescue team arrived just in time to see the *Danzig* go down. They heard a fearful explosion just before they arrived. Not a sign of a survivor."

"I see," said Biff numbly. "Then that winds up my job here, I suppose."

"No need for it now, son," said Inspector Duggin. "The Gorling gang is apparently at the bottom of the Channel."

"Then, unless Stringbourne lives, we'll never know what secrets they stole," said Biff.

"Afraid not," said the inspector. "But at least they're done for, and that's something."

They bade each other good-by, and Biff flipped off his receiver.

"Well, that's that," he said to Peter. "Of course, Stringbourne may talk, but our part in this case seems to be closed."

"Speaking of Stringbourne," said Peter, "I heard Dad say they're taking him to the hospital in Exeter. He may be able to talk soon."

They turned out the lights in the office and headed for their room. After quick showers, they tumbled into bed and slept the first sound sleep they had slept in many nights.

Next morning, they took their time at breakfast, and it was well toward 10:30 before they strolled up to Stringbourne's office where Biff was to pack the short-wave receiver for shipment back to the Coast Guard.

As they walked into the office, the special phone from the Coast Guard was ringing.

"I thought our business with those boys was finished," Biff murmured, picking up the receiver.

"Biff Brewster here," said Biff in the English style he had begun to use to supplant the American "hello."

"Biff," said a voice he recognized as the Coast Guard radio technician with whom he had worked the day before. "I've something rather strange for you."

"Oh!" said Biff. "What's up?"

"Remember that signal from the *Danzig* you asked me to pinpoint?" said the technician. "Well, it wasn't sent from the spot where the *Danzig* went down."

Biff sat bolt upright. "How's that again?"

"No. It was sent from a spot at least twenty miles west of there. I just noticed it when I checked my radio data with the location turned in by the rescue party."

"No way the *Danzig* could have drifted that far after sending the S O S, is there?" asked Biff.

"Impossible," said the operator.

"Thanks," said Biff. "I'll get back to you."

He hung up the phone thoughtfully and told Peter what the technician had just told him.

"Do you suppose it's a trick?" said Peter. "Could they have scuttled the *Danzig* and sent the S O S from some place else so the authorities would think they'd gone down with the ship?"

"They might have," said Biff, "and there might be a way of finding out."

"Listen to see if Quick Fist reports from some place else," blurted Peter.

"Right!" said Biff, flipping on his receiver. "We're not out of this case yet."

But tune as he might all that day, Biff did not hear the distinctive sound of Gorling's radio operator. They decided that this was due to the fact they were not listening at the operator's regular reporting time; the time of night they had heard him send *Letters From Junius* off the *Danzig*.

So that night, Biff searched the short-wave bands from one end to another, both before and after this hour. But he heard nothing. He called the technician at the Coast Guard and told him of his hunch and that he might still call on the Coast Guard, for help. Biff then called Inspector Duggin and informed him of his theory. The inspector promised to inform National Security.

Next night, Biff listened again. And he listened the next night, and the next—but Quick Fist could not be

heard.

Suddenly, on the third night, came the sound Biff had been waiting for—the very swift code technique of Gorling’s quick-fisted operator.

In a flash, Biff was on the phone to the Coast Guard, giving them the frequency and transcription of the message. Back came the Coast Guard in a matter of minutes with the location of the sender.

“Why this bloke’s not at sea,” said the technician on the phone. “He’s inland. We place him down near Grabling.” He gave Biff the exact location in latitude and longitude.

Peter jumped to the other phone, called Inspector Duggin, and explained what had happened. Duggin pointed out that the case was now officially out of the Yard’s hands, but he would inform National Security Police and have them get on it. He might, he said, even go along himself.

But when the police arrived at the location specified in Biff’s directions, they found only a vacant lot and no sign whatsoever of Gorling.

When the same thing happened again two nights later, the police became slightly miffed. Biff knew they had lost faith in his aerial dragnet. The last location of the elusive Quick Fist proved to be a candy store run by a little old lady who was shocked speechless by the sudden descent of the police.

Thus, when Biff heard what was now the familiar sound of the quick-sending radio operator again two

nights later, he was a little less enthusiastic about informing Coast Guard.

Coast Guard, too, was not so cordial in their greeting. When the technician reported back a few minutes later, however, there was a note of humor in his voice.

"I say," he said. "You might drop in on the chap yourself this time. We locate him not more than ten miles from where you sit!"

Biff started in surprise.

"And where is that?" he asked.

"Out on Dartmoor is where I have him this time," said the technician.

Biff took down the exact location, thanked the man, and hung up. He told Peter of this newest development.

"Should we pass this on to the police?" Peter asked.

"Let's tell our dads. Perhaps they'll know what to do," said Biff.

"Oh, I forgot," said Peter with a snap of his fingers. "Dad and your father have gone to Exeter to the hospital. They think Stringbourne may be able to talk."

Biff turned thoughtfully back to his receiver. He listened closely to the outpouring of code from the fast-handed operator and transcribed it onto a pad before him.

"He's really sending a mass of data tonight, whatever it is," he said. "It's just gibberish to me. Some sort of code, I'm sure."

“I hope that isn’t a bad sign,” said Peter.

“What’s that?”

“Sending so much data tonight. It might mean they’re getting ready to fold up—maybe check out of the country.”

“It could be they know they’ve been one jump ahead of the police these past few days,” said Biff. “How they’ve been able to do it, I don’t know. But they’ll soon tumble to the fact that it’s their radio transmission that’s bringing the law down on them. Then they’ll stop, and we’ll lose our chance to ever track them again.”

“What do you suggest?” said Peter.

“Well,” said Biff, a sly look in his eye. “Our dads aren’t here. The police think we’re nuts. Gorling may be gone tomorrow. Mom and the twins will be here soon. So why don’t we do a little reconnoitering out there on that moor—just you and me?”

CHAPTER XVII

Dartmoor

THE headlights of the little sports car poked yellow fingers into the blackness of the Dartmoor Road. Biff, at the wheel of the car borrowed from Sir Charles's garage, peered out at the boulder-lined highway, twisting upward toward the crest of the moor, misty and melancholy against the night sky.

Peter stared ahead into the gloom and said: "We are slightly simple to try this, don't you know."

"No doubt," said Biff.

"We could turn back."

"We could, yes."

"Will we?"

"I doubt it."

"You're remembering what they tried on Stringbourne, of course." Peter murmured.

"I'm trying to forget," answered Biff.

"They might try something more direct with us," Peter suggested.

"We're armed, aren't we?" said Biff.

"With the gun from the *Danzig*," said Peter.

"Still empty, of course?"

"Of course."

"I don't think they'll go for that empty gun routine again," Biff drawled. "Remember, they made it up."

"I do have a torch," said Peter.

"You mean a flashlight?" said Biff.

"I mean a torch," said Peter. "You're in jolly old England now, and over here it's a torch."

"Oh, dreadfully sorry and all that," said Biff, imitating Peter's accent. "You English do have such a quaint way of putting things."

"Oh, quaint, is it?" Peter retorted. "Well, it happens to be our language, you know. We just loaned it to you Americans, and you bent it all out of shape."

"I suppose we did." Biff laughed. "But back to our torch. Where is it?"

Peter held it aloft, and Biff heard him flip the switch. A strange, red glow filled the interior of the car.

"That's a torch?" Biff snorted. "Well, throw it away and find a flashlight then!"

"It is dim, isn't it?" said Peter.

"Where did you find that?" Biff asked

"In Stringbourne's desk," said Peter, studying the red glow cast by the torch. He flipped it on and off and said, "Biff, I say—do you suppose this could be some special kind of light?"

Biff cast a sidelong glance at the instrument, then returned his eyes to the twisting road. "What's special about it?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Peter, "but I've heard of certain lands of light that penetrate fog farther than ordinary light. Do you suppose that could be what this is?"

"What makes you think so?" Biff asked.

"Well, I found it in Stringbourne's office. Remember we wondered how he might have communicated with Gorling in the past. Do you suppose he could have used this light to flash him signals?"

"From Edensboro, you mean?"

"Yes," exclaimed Peter, suddenly remembering the lights they had seen. "Perhaps Gorling picked up the messages from one of the hills around Edensboro or even with binoculars from out on the moor here."

"By golly, it's a possibility," said Biff.

"I think it's more than that," exclaimed Peter. "This would explain why Gorling and his radio man came up here to the moor tonight. They'd been here before."

"Could be," Biff admitted. "Not that it helps us very much to know that right now."

Peter looked at the empty gun and the dully glowing torch and said, "There isn't much, can help us except old Dame Fortune."

Biff was silent as he maneuvered the little car around a particularly sharp curve. "Did you leave a note for our dads?" he finally asked.

"Yes, and a message for Inspector Duggin at his

office telling him where we'd be," said Peter.

"Why Duggin?"

"Because he's the bullet-proof type it would be nice to have on this trip," said Peter. "They said he was on his way down to Edensboro and they'd radio and tell him our message."

"Very good, Dr. Watson," said Biff.

"And you, Sherlock—what were you doing all this time?" asked Peter.

"Plotting Gorling's location on a map of the moor from the figures the Coast Guard gave me," said Biff, tapping a piece of paper in his breast pocket. "According to the map, this road takes us right to the vicinity where the last radio call came from."

"I was afraid it might," said Peter.

"It was your idea to make a whodunit out of this," Biff taunted. "Don't blame me because the plot has thickened "

"Very well, Sherlock," said Peter. "Drive on."

Biff slipped the car into second gear as the twisting road got steeper. High banks on either side seemed to close in on them, and the gnarled and stunted firs clawed out at them from the granite walls. They crossed a foaming stream and drove along its edge for about a mile. One last curve and the ground flattened out suddenly.

They had reached the top of the moor.

Huge and sprawling, it seemed as cold as the surface of the moon. Rocky craigs jutted up from the

earth like tombstones swept about by a giant hand, and a chill wind whistled through the heather that waved and beckoned in the blackness. Wisps of mist curled up from cairns and tors hollowed out of the rocks, and dark shadows danced a ghostly counterpoint to the waving of the heather.

Biff's hands felt damp on the wheel, despite the chill of the night. Involuntarily his foot released its pressure on the accelerator, and the car began to slow.

"That's being a sensible boy," said Peter. "Now a nice U turn, and we'll be heading in the right direction."

Biff pushed down again on the gas pedal and grinned over at Peter.

For five minutes, they wound through the patchy mist on the moor, searching for some sign, so Biff could check his map. When he came to a fork in the road, he found it on his map and turned south. Peter mumbled something uncomplimentary.

They had eased along, slowed down by the mist and the rutted road, when Biff suddenly slammed on the brakes and turned out the headlights.

"What on earth—" demanded Peter.

"Look!" gasped Biff, pointing across the moor to the west.

"I can't. I'm hiding under the dashboard," croaked Peter.

On a rocky knoll, etched starkly against the gray horizon, stood a great stone mansion. It seemed dark

and deserted, except for one thing—a lone, yellow light winked out from one small window. Then it, too, was gone.

“I’ll bet that’s it,” Biff whispered, fumbling for his map.

“With our luck, *of course* it is,” groaned Peter.

Biff turned on the car’s map light, poked a finger at an X he had marked on the map, then looked up at the gaunt mansion. “That’s right where Coast Guard pin-pointed Quick Fist,” he said.

“Good. Now let’s go back and report it to the police,” said Peter.

Biff slowly opened the door on his side. “If we were wrong, I wouldn’t want to face those cops again,” he said.

“I would,” Peter groaned.

“Let’s make sure,” said Biff, slipping out the door.

“I was afraid you’d say that,” said Peter, climbing out and hurrying to Biff’s side.

They struck off up the road toward the mansion, leaving the car behind in the mist. As they walked, the moor’s eerie sights and sounds closed in and embraced them. The wind snarled belligerently and picked at their clothes with cold little fingers. The heather waved at them, and the shadows looked like crouching figures in the gloom.

Slowly, they drew near the darkened mansion, and as they did, they saw that it was crumbling in parts and was surrounded by a high, iron fence that sagged

here and there. Two stone pillars at the center of the fence supported a great iron gate that swung creaking in the wind.

They squirmed through the fence and crept up through the heather which had encroached upon the grounds, and they saw for the first time the dark shape of something standing in front of the house.

It was a car.

Drawing near, the boys looked closely at the car, and their hearts began to jump. There was no doubt about it. This was the car in which they had ridden with Gorling!

They crept up close to the car and looked inside. Biff tried the door on the driver's side.

"What are you doing?" Peter demanded.

"Going to see if the keys are in the car," Biff whispered.

"For what?"

"Grab 'em, so they can't leave," said Biff. He turned the handle hard. It was locked. Glancing down at the rear tire, he said, "We can always flatten their tires. That'll slow them up."

"What if they should hear?"

"Go ahead. Start on the right rear," Biff said. "I'll see if the other door is open."

He scurried around the car as he heard Peter start to let the air out of the tire. He tried the door handle, and to his satisfaction, it opened. He peered into the car, trying to locate the ignition lock, then crawled up

on the seat to feel for it along the dashboard. His heart' leaped as he felt the keys. He jerked them out of the ignition—and dropped them on the floor!

As he did, his foot slipped, and to his horror, he fell squarely across the horn button.

CHAPTER XVIII

Comedy of Terrors

“Ahoouoooooahhhhhbhh!” blared the horn.

“Oops!” said Biff.

“Butterfingers!” said Peter.

They headed in panicky, stumbling, headlong flight toward the tall heather.

They were practically in midair when a door of the mansion squeaked open. A shaft of light stabbed the gloom, and into it stepped a familiar figure—a bearded figure peering out into the darkness.

“It’s him!” Biff whispered, looking back. “Old Brush Face Gorling.”

“He’ll see you,” Peter whispered. “Down!”

In the next instant, the bearded Gorling was joined in the doorway by the man in the trench coat, and a second later, by the slight, fair-haired figure whose quick fist had led the boys there—the radio operator.

“Hail, hail—the gang’s all here,” said Biff.

They saw Gorling snap his fingers, and the radio

operator slipped a flashlight into his hand. The bearded leader aimed it across the moor in a slow arc, and the boys ducked as it swept over their heads.

"What do you think they think?" Biff asked.

"I'm out of the thinking business and in the running business," Peter whispered. "Follow me."

"Wait," Biff said, grabbing Peter by a retreating ankle. "I think we've scared them off."

"The feeling's mutual," said Peter, fighting to free his ankle.

"No, I mean I think they're going to leave," said Biff, pointing toward the men. "Look."

The two other men had hurried back into the old mansion, leaving Gorling alone by the car. In a moment, the radio operator appeared with two metal cases in his hands.

"Holy smoke!" said Biff. "The radio equipment. They *are* leaving!"

"Bon voyage to them," said Peter.

"But if they leave, we may never be able to make contact with them again," Biff complained.

"Oh, happy day!"

"We've got to think of some way to stop them," said Biff frantically.

"What do you mean, we?" said Peter. "You can count better than that."

Biff crawled up close to Peter. "Look, Peter old boy," he said. "Do you mean to tell me that you would think first of your own selfish skin when you have the

chance to help your country by capturing three spies?"

"Capture them!" Peter gasped. "With an empty gun?"

"I didn't mean capture them necessarily," Biff hedged. "Just stall them. After all, we did leave a note for our dads, and Inspector Duggin knows we're here. Maybe they will get here in time to grab them."

"Biff, with that empty gun and that funny torch?"

Biff grabbed Peter by the arm.

"That red light—that may be a gimmick!" said Biff.

He looked toward the mansion where Gorling and the two men were hurrying luggage into the car.

"Stringbourne used this thing to signal Gorling," he said. "What if Gorling saw it shining out here? He might think he was losing his marbles—that it was Stringbourne's ghost or something." Biff grinned at Peter. "How does it sound?"

"Like a grade B movie," said Peter.

"No—seriously."

"Okay, seriously," said Peter. "Like a grade C movie."

"But Gorling might get inquisitive," Biff insisted. "If we could ever lure them out here on the moor, we could make a dash for the car and grab the keys . . . I'm going to try it!"

"May you rest in peace—and leggo my leg," said Peter.

But before Peter could move, Biff had the torch in his hand, and in the next instant was aiming it at the

three men and blinking it on and off.

For a moment, the men gave no sign that they were aware of the light, but suddenly the boys saw the radio operator grab Gorling's arm and point to where Biff was flashing the red torch. Gorling's mouth flew open, and he took a tentative step or two in their direction, then stopped. The two other men hurried to his side, conversed for a few seconds, then just stared at the winking light.

"Note how inquisitive they are," Peter jeered. "They aren't about to come investigate."

"We'll see," said Biff. "Let me try *this*." And he began to flick the switch off and on in the dots and dashes of the Morse code. S T R . . .

"How do you spell Stringbourne?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Forget it," Peter answered. "Look at them."

The three men had turned back to their car loading, and were casting only occasional glances over their shoulders.

"The dirty rats!" Biff snarled. "Don't have a curious bone in their sneaking bodies."

"I hate to say I-told-you-so," said Peter. "But now, if I were doing this—which I'm not—I would create something a little more imaginative, if you don't mind my saying so."

"I knew you'd catch the spirit," said Biff. "Do go on."

"Well, sir, if one is to attract rats, one must pique their imagination, so to speak."

“Do you happen to have an imagination piquer on you?” said Biff.

“How about a nice, headless, ten-foot-tall ghost?” said Peter.

“Run that by again?”

“One of us on the other’s shoulders, with both of us wearing our coats to make it look like one long coat; the red light inside one coat to make it look like the whole thing is glowing; then we stroll casually across the moor like the headless horseman on his day off.”

“How does the headless part come in?”

“I pull my coat up over my head. I’m on top, you see.”

“How come you’re on top?”

“Because it’s my idea. Any more questions?”

“You got a deal,” said *Biff*. “Hurry up and climb on before they take off and leave us with nothing but a beautiful idea.”

Peter placed his foot in Biff’s intertwined fingers and vaulted to his shoulders. Perched there, he wound his legs around Biff’s torso and locked his feet in back. He then pulled his coat up over his head, buttoned it, and pulled his arms out of the sleeves so they dangled loosely.

“Beautiful touch, that,” said Biff from below.

“I don’t know how it looks from the outside, but it looks scary from the inside,” Peter whispered.

“Ready to go, glowworm?” Biff asked.

“Roger,” said Peter. “Start your ghostly walk.”

Biff began to walk slowly through the heather, and as he did, he saw that Peter was flicking the red torch on and off above his head. Then the English boy began to emit a soft, low moan. As Biff strolled along, the moans kept getting louder and more gruesome

“You’re overacting!” Biff croaked.

Peter’s moans grew more temperate, and now Biff allowed himself a peek through one of the buttonholes in the trench coat draped over his face.

He could see immediately that the rats’ imaginations had definitely been piqued. The three men were staring in their direction, and Gorling had even started to walk slowly toward them.

“Don’t push our luck too far,” Biff whispered.

“Just a step or two more—and we’ll vanish into the mist, like all good ghosts do,” said Peter.

Biff got by the first of the two steps, but the second one proved disastrous. His foot dropped into a hole; he staggered forward, and his knees gave way.

“Timber-r. . .” he gasped.

Down went the bottom of the ten-foot ghost with the top half right on top of him.

“Ouch! My knee!” grunted Peter. ,

“Ouch, your knee in my ear!” Biff cried.

“It’s those two kids!” they heard Gorling shout.

“Our ghost is cooked!” said Peter.

“Well, that’s show biz,” grunted Biff, scrambling to his feet and heading off across the moor.

“Wait for headless—and brainless!” Peter called.

They staggered through the pitch darkness—barking their shins, bruising their ankles—but fighting their way in headlong flight from the sound of pursuit.

“I think they’re gaining!” Peter yelled.

“Don’t be silly. We’re old track men at school. They can’t catch us,” Biff puffed.

“Show them our press notices. They’re getting closer!”

“You head west and draw them off,” Biff called. “I’m going to try and circle back to the car and heave those keys out on the moor!”

Peter headed off into the darkness in one direction; Biff headed off in another. He was running easily now, in a wide circle that he hoped would lead him back to the car with enough distance gained to enable his plan to work.

The sounds of pursuit were growing dim behind him, so Biff decided to make a break for the fence. He dashed the last few yards, squeezed through the iron grill, and headed pell-mell for Gorling’s car.

He skidded up to the passenger side, jerked open the door, and fumbled around on the floor where he had dropped the keys. For a frantic moment, he was afraid Gorling had removed them; but suddenly, his fingers felt the cold metal. He grasped them, raised up and turned to throw the keys out onto the dark moor. But as he stood with arm upraised, a pursuer broke out of the heather. It was Gorling—and in his hand was a gun. He started to aim it at Biff.

It was then that Biff fired the bunch of keys straight at Gorling's face and heard them hit home. Gorling cried out in surprise and pain and staggered backward, his heel catching on a rock. Down he went, with the keys falling in a bunch at his side.

Biff went running toward the keys like a soccer player, and with one great kick, sent them sailing off into the gloom.

Then Biff sailed off after them.

But at that moment, his luck ran out. Gorling's hand flew out and grabbed his ankle. Biff felt his ankle turn and he went down in a heap. He turned on his back just as the flying Gorling landed atop him—and the lights went out.

When Biff came to, he was being dragged by the scruff of the neck through the rocks and the heather back toward the car. When Gorling reached the car, he propped Biff up against the car's fender.

Biff opened his eyes and saw Gorling leaning over him with two guns in his hands. He slid one into his pocket and pointed the other at Biff's nose.

"Like to play ghost, do you?" snarled the spy leader.

"Not much," Biff grumbled. "The top half had all the lines."

"The moment they bring your young friend back, we are going on another ocean voyage," said Gorling. "And this time there will be no open door and no—shall we say—escape?" said Gorling.

They heard a wrestling sound and loud grunting on

the other side of the car. A moment later, Gorling's two companions appeared, the trench-coated man and the radio operator, dragging Peter between them.

"Hello there," Biff called. "Haven't seen you around lately."

"Strange," said Peter brightly. "I've been around—and around—and around—this old mansion."

"Shut up and get in the car," Gorling snapped.

The trench-coated man reached for the door and opened it, but an arm appeared from within the car. The arm held a gun, and behind the gun, a familiar voice said, "Oh, I'm afraid there's no room back here, chaps! Hands up, please."

And from the floor of the back seat, rose a man with a bristly mustache and a gaunt face.

"Inspector Duggin!" Biff shouted.

Marius Gorling stepped back and raised his gun. But suddenly he was staring at it and cursing.

Biff was convulsed with laughter. "Well, isn't that rich!" he howled. "Now *he's* got the empty gun. He must have taken it out of my pocket while I was knocked out. He got his guns scrambled!"

Inspector Duggin climbed out of the back seat, and commanded the three spies to place their hands on the top of the car and stand that way. As he frisked them, Peter gasped, "Where on earth did you come from, sir?"

"My car's out there," the inspector drawled, pointing toward the dark moor. "I saw all you chaps run-

ning round the house, so I thought I'd step into this car and wait until you all got back. Saved time having to round you up."

"You always seem to get here just a few minutes after the heavies have worked us over," said Biff, rubbing his sore spots.

"Serves you right for taking this case out of police hands," snapped Inspector Duggin. "You'll really catch it from your fathers when they lay hands on you."

"Oh dear," moaned Peter. "If you think these spy chaps were bad, wait until you see Sir Charles Balsam when he's all riled up."

"Well, Dr. Watson," said Biff jauntily, "I believe that wraps up another one. And guess what? "

"I know what you're going to say," Peter sighed. "I'm hungry.' "

"So am I." Biff laughed. "So let's bundle these chaps up, mail 'em to National Security, and go get some chow."

A few evenings later a big party was held at Peter's grandmother's home. Biff and Peter were the guests of honor because of their good work in helping trap the spy ring which had been stealing atomic engine secrets from Edensboro for months. Their dads, Inspector Duggin, and the recently arrived Mrs. Brewster and the twins were there. Gorling and his cohorts were in jail, and Stringbourne was slowly recovering, after having made a full confession regarding

his part in the plot. Gorling, he said, had been blackmailing him because of some early political indiscretions at Oxford when he was a student there.

Peter had presented his grandmother with the copy of *Letters From Junius*, and when she expressed her gratitude at the dinner that night he said, "Were you fooled by the book, Grandmother?"

"I must admit I was," said the old lady. "In fact, until I noticed the watermark I was completely hoodwinked. Too bad so clever a craftsman directed his energies toward crime instead of some honorable pursuit."

"Ah, but if he hadn't," said Peter, "we wouldn't all be here celebrating tonight, would we Biff, old chap?"

"Oh, quite, old boy," said Biff. "Quite."